

TYPOGRAPHY IN FILM CREDIT SEQUENCES

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**CULTURAL CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
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ABSTRACT

This study presents an investigation of typography as a visual element in context of film opening credits based on principles of visual perception derived from Gestalt psychology and Formalism within film theory. The research will be conducted in an effort to reveal the communicative qualities of typography in film titles as well as the significance of screen based typography as a visual element and its capability to express certain styles and moods in relation to the film. Typography in film credit sequences in previous studies has been considered merely as an informative and denotative element as they have all emphasized on the literal meaning of the type. Therefore there is a lack of analytical study on visual perception and connotative role of typography in the context of film titles based on film theory interpretation. This research was initiated in an effort to further examine the communicative values of typography in film titles based on a theoretical methodology derived from common concepts between Gestalt principles of visual perception and formalism within film theory. The study analyzes various examples of typography in film titles based on categories of the provided theoretical framework which examine typography in five different aspects. The findings of this study emphasize the role of typography as a formal and visual element in film titles in terms of implying certain meanings and signifying the mood of the film; as well as its role as a connotative and figurative element in film title sequences.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyampaikan satu penelitian tipografi sebagai elemen visual dalam konteks kredit pembukaan filem berdasarkan prinsip-prinsip persepsi visual yang diambil daripada psikologi Gestalt dan teori Filem Formalis. Kajian ini akan dilakukan dalam usaha untuk mendedahkan aspek komunikatif tipografi dalam tajuk filem serta kepentingan *tipografi berasaskan tajuk* sebagai elemen visual dan keupayaannya dalam mengekspres sesetengah stail dan mood yang berkaitan dengan filem. Tipografi dalam turutan kredit filem dalam banyak kajian lepas dianggap hanya sebagai elemen berinformasi dan denotatif memandangkan penekanan kajian-kajian ini adalah tentang makna literalnya sahaja. Justeru, berdasarkan mana-mana teori interpretasi filem, masih terdapat kelompongan kajian analitikal tentang persepsi visual dan peranan konotatif tipografi dalam konteks tajuk filem. Kajian ini dianjurkan sebagai satu usaha untuk memahami lagi nilai komunikatif dalam tipografi tajuk filem berdasarkan metodologi teoretikal yang digarap daripada konsep-konsep serumpun antara prinsip-prinsip Gestalt ke atas persepsi visual dan teori filem formalis. Kajian ini menganalisa banyak contoh-cotnoh tipografi dalam tajuk-tajuk filem berasaskan kategori yang terbina dalam rangka teoretikal, yang mengenal pasti tipografi untuk lima aspek berbeza. Hasil kajian ini menekankan peranan tipografi sebagai elemen formal dan visual dalam tajuk-tajuk filem dalam menyampaikan sesetengah makna dan menaikkan mood filem; juga sebagai elemen konotatif dan figuratif dalam turutan tajuk filem.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Film titles have grown along with the film industry during the history of cinema as a critical part of the films. As cinema has turned into one of the most popular sensations of the 21st century, opening credit sequences play an essential role as an introductory element towards the films (May, 2010). A film's credit sequence is the opening moment presented to the viewer as an introduction to the whole movie. They present the general idea of the film's narrative as well as its mood and genre. Richard Greenberg who greatly developed graphic design in film industry, describes film titles as a "Visual Metaphor" that reveal the "tone" and notion of the film. He explains that film titles separate people from reality and bring them "into" the movie: "You want to tell them how to react: that it's all right to laugh, that they are going to be scared, or that something serious is going on" (quoted in Carter, Day & Meggs, 2012). Counts (2005, p.2) describes titles as the most important moment in a film that function "as a prologue to the movie; setting the tone, establishing the mood and foreshadowing the action."

This paper will analyze the application of typography in film credit sequences based on Gestalt laws of perception, in order to understand and present the significance of screen based typography as a visual element and its capability to express certain themes and moods in relation to the film. Gestalt psychology was developed by three German psychologists during the 1910's and 1920's. Gestalt principles refer to the 'whole' or unity of a structure and layout, which has greater assets than the small individual part within. This theory offers concrete clarifications on how time, space, position and shape can have significant effect on overall perception of visual elements (Brownie, 2008). Since the early twentieth century art theorists have employed Gestalt psychology to develop art making instructions based on visual perception. According to Behrens (1998, p.301) "one of the reasons artists embraced Gestalt theory is that it provided, in their

minds, scientific validation of age-old principles of composition and page layout.” Behrens (1998) explains that Gestalt theory became connected to “aestheticism” because it focuses on “flat abstract patterns, structural economy and implicitness” (p.301). However, in the field of typography, the use of concepts based on Gestalt psychology has not been directly applied; and Gestalt theory does not offer any principle exclusively on the application of text and typography in visual arts (Horak, 2014). However some typography theorists such as Robert Bringhurst have tried to create guidelines for creating typography design. One of such principles states that typography must express the inner meaning or message of the text; and another claims that typography must reveal the connection between the text and other elements such as photographs and diagrams (Bringhurst, 2005, pp. 20-24). Both principles can be practiced in typography of film credits, as “the goal is to create an inner logic between the content and meaning of the film and the typography of the credits” (Horak, 2014, p.92), also because in this context “relationships exist between typography and background images, animation, optical effects” and the overall visual design (Horak, 2014, p.92). As the role of visual communication becomes more significant every day, the need for more fundamental study on typography gets more essential in the field (Yu, 2008).

Film title sequences seem to have been more of a subject of interest to graphic designers rather than film historians and cinema students. This is probably because of a designer mindset which tends to look at film titles as a piece of design similar to a poster design or an advertisement; a piece engaged with typography and visual elements completely isolated from the filmmaking itself. Las Casas (2007, p.15) describes film titles as “a powerful tool of art and communication” which takes part in the story of the film and introduces the narrative to the audience. The main titles are “the soul of a film’s presentation while establishing a pattern for the development of the visual communication of the whole movie production, as the result of a strong interaction between functional

and persuasive qualities” (Las Casas, 2007, p.15). According to a few scholars, film title sequences in the beginning of every movie have a major role in terms of communication. They allow the filmmakers to present the style and mood of their films; as well as specifying the fundamental content of the film and what the audience is going to deal with (Gollin 1992; Lester 1995; Soberanis 1997; Van Nierop 1998). David Fincher (2011) the well-known American director thinks that the title sequences are the opportunity to set the stage for the film and reorient the audiences’ mindset. This research presents a historical overview of film title sequences and explores the subject of visual perception in two relating theories as well as application of those theories on the communicative function of typography in film title designs.

This thesis intends to develop our understanding of the phenomenon of visual perception of typography in film title sequences, as a connotative and formal element. While many designers may arrange type intuitively to suggest various messages, moods and emotions, this thesis reveals the conscious and theoretical understanding of this intuitive process. It breaks down this process into its smaller parts and examine how each of these parts work through the use of Gestalt theory and formalism within film theory. It points out how the human eye habitually attribute a certain connotative meaning to a certain structure or configuration of type. Moreover, it argues that Gestalt theory alone cannot account for this process. Rather, it is the combination of concepts from Gestalt and *mise-en-scene* that can account for this phenomena of cinematic perception.

Gestalt theory is used in this study to understand the basics of visual perception, and formalist film theory to find out how such visual concepts are used to create meaning in films. Brownie also mentions that screen based typography is able to portray Gestalt laws of perception more than traditional type such as print, as it encompasses both spatial and temporal dimensions.

This research aims to provide a theoretical framework on how Gestalt principles are directly connected to formalism within film theory and how these two theories could be applied in order to recognize typography with connotative qualities for film credit sequences in which they can express the film's overall theme or message. The study sets out to contribute these guidelines for designers and academics in the realm of typography design; as well as to increase the new designers' understanding of visual perception theory in relation to typography, in order to enhance their ability to create more dynamic as well as meaningful and connotative typography design. It helps the new designers to become capable of interpreting their own works in terms of their visual perception; and encourages them to further explore the application of perception theories to typography. As the print based typography and its role in visual communication has been studied frequently, this research aims to draw more attention to important role of screen based typography as a visual and graphic element rather than just verbal or informative.

1.2 Significance of Study

This study is significant in terms of understanding visual perception of typography in a new context which is film title sequences. The importance of this matter is that typography is interpreted as a formal element and its communicative value is explained based on two theories. This thesis has developed a set of guidelines that explain the function of typography based on concepts from principles of Gestalt psychology and *mise-en-scene* interpretation in formalism within film theory. The study sets out to contribute these guidelines for designers and academics in the realm of typography design; as well as to increase the new designers' understanding of visual perception theory in relation to typography, in order to enhance their ability to create more dynamic as well as meaningful and connotative typography design. It helps the new designers to become capable of interpreting their own works in terms of their visual perception; and

encourages them to further explore the application of perception theories to typography. As the print based typography and its role in visual communication has been studied frequently, this research aims to draw more attention to important role of screen based typography as a visual and graphic element rather than just verbal or informative.

In addition, this study contributes to the understanding of Gestalt principles and its similarities with formalism within film theory and *mise-en-scene*. The use of both these theories offer a more comprehensive framework which is suited for screen-based typography design. Thus, this study should interest researchers in the field of visual perception in general and researchers of typography in particular.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This research initially aims to investigate how Gestalt psychology has been applied in formalism within film theory in terms of visual perception. After finding out about the relation between Gestalt and formalism in film, these two theories can be applied in understanding of perception of typography as a visual ‘form’ in film titles in order to find out how typography creates certain meanings related to the theme and story of the film. In other words, first aim of this research is to understand the fundamentals of visual perception of formal elements in film studies; second is to theoretically explain the visual perception of typography as a formal element in film. Ideas from Gestalt and formalism in film theory, are both used in this research in order to interpret the communicative role of typography in film titles.

Objectives

- 1- To explain how perception of typography as a formal element works in film title sequences using Gestalt theory and formalism in film theory.
- 2- To examine the communicative function of typography in terms of conveying the mood of the film.

Questions

- 1- How are Gestalt principles applied in formalism within film theory in terms of visual perception?
- 2- How do various characteristics of typography such as size, composition, color and proximity affect the perception of the title sequences in terms of expression of the mood and content of the film (based on interpretations of formalism in film theory)?

1.4 Outline of Dissertation

This research is divided into five chapters. As mentioned earlier, the first chapter introduces the topic of the study as well as addressing the problem that initiated this research, along with the aims and objectives that this dissertation is intended to accomplish.

Chapter two first reviews the existing literature about the issue of interest and the previous studies done on typography in film titles as well as mentioning the gap in the academic research on the visual perception of typography and its communicative role in film titles. Secondly, chapter two identifies the historical background of the research area, which includes the evolution of the film titles through history of film. Chapter two carries on with a thorough analysis of development of typography techniques in film title designs from the early years of cinema history until the age of technology. Then the chapter

reviews the history of Gestalt theory and a brief background of Saul Bass, who has had the most crucial role in development of contemporary film titles having been influenced by Gestalt theory of visual perception.

Chapter three which is the methodology of the study, provides the theoretical framework of the research. The chapter begins with identifying the two key theories that have been used to found this analysis, Gestalt theory of perception and its relation to typography and design, as well as formalism within film theory. This chapter reveals the association between Gestalt and formalism in film theory and how the Gestaltist and film theorist Rudolf Arnheim has employed Gestalt ideas in his studies of formalism in film theory. The third part of this chapter introduces the term *mise-en-scene*, followed by a short history of the term and explaining why this term has been employed in this research in order to interpret typography in film titles. Then it goes on with identifying the elements of *mise-en-scene* which have been the groundwork for creation of the theoretical framework in this research. The fourth part of chapter three explains the formation of the theoretical framework based on the overlapping ideas between Gestalt principles of perception and *mise-en-scene* elements. This part discusses how the presented framework is employed in interpreting the communicative role of typography as a visual element in film titles in the next chapter and how various meanings can be elicited from this interpretation.

Chapter four presents the analysis and findings of the dissertation. This chapter is divided into five categories of analysis based on the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter. Each category has been created and named based on the overlapping ideas between Gestalt principles and elements of *mise-en-scene*. The five categories are as followed: Dominance, Size, Closeness, Composition and Color. Various examples of typography in film titles are presented in each category in order to analyze and interpret typography in different aspects and to find out its communicative role and the way it

represents certain meanings and moods in relation to the content of the chosen film. This analysis aims to discuss the issue of typography in film titles based on Gestalt and formalism within film theory, by employing the provided theoretical framework.

Chapter five delivers a summary of the analysis and findings in the previous chapter as well as explaining how such findings might be useful in the field of typography and film title design for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE AND HISTORICAL REVIEW

This chapter initially goes through the existing materials and literature as well as previous studies on the topic of film titles. Through this review of literature the gap in the studies of visual perception of typography in film title sequences will be identified. The chapter carries on with a historical review of film titles through the history of cinema since the silent era until today. Furthermore, this chapter represents an analysis of evolution of typographic techniques applied in the history of film titles in order to reveal the influential factors that caused a major shift in designing film titles in modern era.

2.1 Literature Review

Typography plays an important role as a visual element in credit sequence of films in terms of expressing the films' overall mood and theme. However other than few general critics on Saul Bass's title designs, lack of sufficient academic study on certain aspects of visual role of texts in film credit sequences is evident. Although Gestalt theory explains the psychology and visual perception of artifacts, it does not directly point to perception of typography as a visual element. Brownie (2007, p.1) points out that "among key Gestalt papers, there is minimal reference to the potential applications of Gestalt theory on typography" which is where Wertheimer explains how an unfamiliar arrangement can cause letters to become illegible (Willis, 1938) with the example of when the letters 'M' and 'W' are placed above one another they will no longer be recognized as letters, and they are perceived as a geometrical shape (Brownie, 2012, p.105).

In her PhD thesis Barbra Brownie (2012) reviews the previous studies on the opening credit in films in which they solely focus on the significance of the imagery and ignore the typographic content. Title credits are meant to introduce the film's narrative and express the overall theme of the film (Klein, 2006). However Brownie (2012, pp.132-133) mentions a few people such as Klein (2006), Jacobs (2001), Seiter (1987) and

Laudisio (2010) who have not investigated typographical elements in their analysis of credit sequences for film and television shows, implying that textual credits are not capable of expressing visual messages and themes but only serve as ‘denotative’ elements. Brownie (2012) clarifies that “typographic elements are not explored in analyses of credit sequences” because they are considered as “denotative” elements and “have little to contribute to the expression of key themes” (p.133). Prior to this, Brownie indicated that further exploration is needed on the connection between Gestalt principles and typography as the existing studies are brief (Brownie, 2007). In order to fulfill the gap which has been noted by Brownie, this research has explored various ways that Gestalt principles of visual perception could be applied to typography in film titles.

Brownie (2012) revealed the lack in analysis of typography in film credit sequences; therefore she carried out a study on screen based typography but only investigated the temporal behavior and fluidity of typography in films and television. Brownie also explains Gestalt laws of organization in relation to typography, yet she only focuses on “Gestalt principles in discussions of temporal typography” (Brownie (2012, p.108). To further carry out the study of screen based typography, this research focused on the visual perception of typography in the still images of title sequences as their temporal behavior has been studied previously. Such research is significant in terms of understanding the connotative and communicative role of typography as a visual element.

Graham (2008) reveals the lack of application of Gestalt visual principles to interactive documents; therefore she examines the Gestalt theory in relation to the context of “interactive media design” (p.1). Yu (2008) carried out a study on “applications of typography in film sequence designs, with an emphasis on the selection of typefaces, animation effects, and their relationships to the film genres” (p.4). This research briefly mentions the historical aspect of psychological theories (including Gestalt) in relation to designing the film title sequences, but it does not present an in-depth analysis of

typographical elements of title sequences based on the principles of Gestalt theory. The mentioned research may be further explored as it only covers two aspects of typography in film titles: choice of typefaces and animation effects. Other aspects of typography such as size, color, layout, rhythm, hierarchy have not been investigated in Yu's study.

According to Chandler (1994) in semiotics of visual elements 'denotation' is described as definitional or literal quality of a sign, which in case of typography would be the actual meaning of the words. Chandler (1994) defines 'connotation' as socio-cultural, ideological or emotional meaning of a visual element which in other words would be the expressive or communicative qualities of typography. Typography in credit sequences not only serves as an informative element, but carries visually communicative qualities, expressing the theme and genre of the film. Based on the previous studies in the field of typography in film credit sequences, little research has been done precisely on perception of typography as a visual element in film credit sequences. Therefore there is a need for further exploration on the role of typography as a visual and 'connotative' element in credit sequences in terms of expressing the theme of the film. Typography in such context also needs to be fully investigated in every visual aspect and not only the temporal characteristics and typefaces, but also other visual aspects such as their composition and layout, size, color, hierarchy and their relation with other elements and imagery in the frame. Typefaces and kinetic characteristics may also be looked from other angles as a part of this research. This research is going to rely on Gestalt theory of visual perception in order to investigate various aspects of typography and its connotative qualities in terms visual perception.

This research is derived from the previous studies on communicative function of typography in film titles. Few scholars have studied typography in title sequences from different angles. Cunningham (2001) presented a theoretical framework to analyze the communicative value of moving typographic elements based on film theory. The focus

of his research has been placed on the communicative role of animated typography in title sequences according to their movement. Using a theoretical framework, Cunningham illustrates how temporal expressions convey certain mood or messages in title sequences, analyzing title sequences of *Psycho* (designed by Saul Bass) and *Seven* (designed by Kyle Cooper) as case studies. However other characteristics of typographic elements such as layout, hierarchy, size, color, etc. have not been examined in this research as it has solely been focusing on the kinetic qualities of typography. Straw (2010) examines title sequences in relation to the characteristic of urban life by analyzing their interaction with the spectacle and surfaces of urban life in which the visual aspects of typography has not been the issue of concern.

Brownie uses Semiotics to explain Gestalt theory, however it does not explain the association of the visual elements to the film. On the other hand Cunningham uses film theory to explain the animated typography in film titles and their association to the overall mood of the film. There have been ideas identifying the overlap between Gestalt and formalism; as Gestalt psychology has clearly been applied in film theory specifically among the theorists with formalist views such as Rudolf Arnheim. Andrew (1984) mentions film theorists such as Jean Mitry and Andre Bazin who both had applied Gestalt in relation to perception in film theory opposed to semioticians such as Umberto Eco. Bazin argued that “beneath the semiotic language of film lies a perceptual "manifold" which is never fully exhausted by the film's message” (Andrew, 1984, p.22). What is perceived from this argument is that in relation to film theory, semiotics only explains the intentional and obvious messages within the visual elements, but there is more to discover. For analyzing the visual aspects of typography in film titles, this research uses Gestalt theory of perception as the primary theory, and unlike Brownie who used semiotics to explain the application of typography, this research uses film theory to explain more.

Brownie (2012) claims that typography is directly influenced by Gestalt, however certain ideas from Semiotics can better explain the understanding of the fluid typographic characters. Brownie (2012, p.119) clarifies that Gestalt principles of perception explain how visual elements are perceived as a whole form “however, it does not offer explanation as to how meaning is found in that form. Semiotics offers the concept of the sign, as differentiated from its surroundings and the attribution of particular meaning to that sign”. This idea has driven Brownie into using Semiotics as a complementary theory to explain the results of Gestalt interpretations.

While Brownie uses Gestalt as a Semiotic code, which does not exactly explain certain associations of typography in opening title sequences to the actual look and feel of the film, this paper applies formalism within film theory to interpret the Gestalt principles of perception in relation to typography in title sequences. Using film theory instead of Semiotics has the benefit of explaining the visual elements based on the actual techniques and concepts of perception applied in filmmaking and most particularly in film’s *mise-en-scene*, defining the typographic elements more clearly in terms of the message they carry in relation to the film, and how they imply certain mood and feeling to the audience before the film starts.

2.2 Historical Background

Film title sequence of films is the only part of a film that brings together the two arts of graphic design and filmmaking. According to Bellantoni and Woolman (1999) the art of film title design is the mother of all moving typography. They introduce the actors and filmmakers, but most importantly film titles engage the viewers’ attention and imply the overall mood of the film. However film title sequences have not always been concerned with the graphic art. In the early years of cinema history these sequences were merely used for informative purposes. The historical development of title design through the past

century has been significant in terms of the enhancement of temporal typography and design. The purpose of typography has completely shifted from being solely an informative textual element to an independent visual element that associates with the mood and story of the film. In fact film titles nowadays are short films showcasing the essence of the narrative through graphic art and typography.

According to Hillner (2009, p.35) “Kinetic typography is not necessarily bound to digital media: it has gradually evolved from the design of film titles”. Hillner (2009) further explains that the term ‘kinetic typography’ means ‘the art of print in motion’ which creates an interesting contradiction in the meaning of the words. The term print actually explain the fixation of the typography whether it is on poster or paper. Hillner (2009) believes that static text is not actually capable of moving, and the motion of texts happens based on its context or carrying material. Even the person who is looking at the typography might be moving such as looking at the advertising billboards while sitting in a moving car. However kinetic typography is perceived as type that is in motion, therefore is it known as ‘motion typography’ which is generally used for “screen-based communication” (p. 35).

Film titles were not used as a visual communication tool during the early 1900s. It was only after the 1950s that titles sequences were emerged as a new kind of art and were noticed by designers who tried to develop titles in terms of proper design based of the film’s content and genre. According to Hillner (2009, p.100) “film title sequences can be seen as the origin of motion graphics and of transitional typography. However, film titles initially consisted of static title cards only” during the early years of silent cinema history. After the evolution of film title designs during the 1950s, more enhanced typography and compositions were emerged in the works of title designers. They tried to apply new techniques in creating the typography and imagery of title sequences in order to represent the film’s genre and mood. The evolution of film title design through the history of

cinema has been an important part of this research. As mentioned before, the communicative role of typography is the main focus in this study, therefore it was required to look at the history of typography in the context of film titles. The historical study reveals how typography has been enhanced in terms of visual communication and how the role of film titles has been changed from informative to an important communicative segment of film that could contain emotional and psychological values. A brief history of evolution of title sequences is presented in this chapter.

2.2.1 Evolution of Film Title Design

Typography and lettering had a significant role in early silent films as early as 1900s, appearing on the inter titles between the film's sequences and presenting the film's narrative (May, 2010). However during that period the opening credit sequence design was not considered as an important part of a film as it is today; Such inter titles were only applied in silent films in order to deliver the dialogues, time, place and action and help the audience follow the story (Counts, 2005). In the 1920s the filmmaking industry started to create opening credits for films by placing "title cards" at the early sequences (Figure 2.1) which could be considered as the earliest examples of opening title credits (Yu, 2008). These titles cards were hand lettered according to the 19th century letter signs by typesetters and lettering artists and were later photographed and inserted in the film (King, 2004). Generally, credit sequence design remained its conventional fashion during the following decades (1930s – 1940s); though the music may have expressed the mood of the film, the classical typography remained its simplicity on a plain background (Thomson, 1998).



Figure 2.1: Title credits of films during the 1920's
Source: <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/10/the-art-of-the-film-title-throughout-cinema-history/>

2.2.1.1 1920s – 1940s

Title sequences as what we refer to nowadays, did not exist in the early days of cinema; Still typography and lettering had a significant role in early silent films as early as 1900s, appearing on the inter titles between the film's sequences and presenting the film's narrative (May, 2010). However during that period the opening credit sequence design was not considered as an important part of a film as it is today; Such inter titles were only applied in silent films in order to deliver the dialogues, time, place and action and help the audience follow the story (Counts, 2005). The title credits often appeared in simple lettering over a still image which displayed the genre of the film; however in the early 1900 there were a few number of films that featured creative openings and title sequences such as *Intolerance* (1916) directed by D. W. Griffith (Kirkham, 2011).

In the 1920s the filmmaking industry started to create opening credits for films by placing "title cards" at the early sequences (Figure 1) which could be considered as the earliest examples of opening title credits (Yu, 2008). These titles cards were hand lettered according to the 19th century letter signs by typesetters and lettering artists and were later photographed and inserted in the film (King, 2004). Generally, credit sequence design remained its conventional fashion during the following decades (1930s – 1940s); though the music may have expressed the mood of the film, the classical typography remained

its simplicity on a plain background (Thomson, 1998). During the 1920s the main purpose of making title sequences was to introduce the cast and crew of the movie to the audience which could be considered as a ‘label’ to the film. Although as there were only a small group of people associated with the process of filmmaking during that period of time, they would not get any credit on the screen and it was only the famous names of the actors that would appear on the title sequences (Inceer, 2007). In this decade the influence of art movements such as nouveau, art deco and expressionism on typefaces displayed in film titles was noticeable (May, 2010).

After the emergence of sound in 1927 and Technicolor in 1935, more advanced title sequences began to appear during the following decades. Counts (2005) mentioned that after the application of sound to the film industry, title sequences evolved as well. In the 1930s the film industry took a step forward in creating more complete titles sequences with higher quality of design in order to catch the attention of the audience prior to the film. The idea was to create film titles which were more than just simple lettering in order to ‘set a mood’ in relation to the film’s narrative (Yu, 2008) such as titles sequences of *King Kong* (1933) employing the latest technology of the time which was unique in that era (Inceer, 2007).

2.2.1.2 1950s – 1970s

The 1950s was an important era in film industry and specially for opening credit design. During the 1950s to 1960s filmmakers were began producing and actually designing the opening title sequences that were visually related to the film’s narrative and were different from the traditional film titles (King, 2004). New trends in title sequence design emerged in the 1950s by figures such as Saul Bass, Maurice Binder, Pablo Ferro, Wayne Fitzgerald, Stephen Frankfurt, Richard Greenberg, and Kyle Cooper. The 1950s is considered as the time when the title sequence design was truly born as innovative

techniques were applied in order to make more interactive and metaphorical typography and creating a whole new world (May, 2010).

According to Hall (2013) the film title design was actually born in 1955 “when director Otto Preminger unveiled his dark thriller *The Man with the Golden Arm* (Figure 2.2) with a striking monochrome graphic sequence designed by Saul Bass.” (p.30). Bass as a graphic designer applied a various range of techniques such as motion typography, montage, cut-out paper and animation in attempt to create more innovative title sequences. In *The Man with the Golden Arm* which was Bass’ breakthrough in film titles, with a reductionist style, he created metaphoric sequences summarizing the story in a single concept by depicting simple white lines on black background and of course that iconic arm which became the main icon of the film. By such innovative techniques Bass made a shift from boring titles of the 1920s to a more dynamic and conceptual sequences representing the mood of the film which are considered as art forms (Inceer, 2007).

Bass’ methodology in creating title sequences has inspired designers in the following decades and even up to now we can witness his influence in the field of graphic design. Other influential works of Bass are the title designs for Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Psycho* (1961). May (2010) discusses the lack of attention to typography in title designs in this period; as the focus has been entirely drawn to the imagery used as background of the credits and that many designers have been oblivious about the interaction between the typography and imagery. May (2010) mentions that among all designers of the era, Saul Bass was the one who treated title design as an actual art, as if he was designing a logo, paying attention to the lettering and typography and representing it as the main element. Kirkham (1994) stated that Saul Bass “not only brought a visual unity to film advertising and promotion, but also radically altered the role of titles and credits, making them an integral part of the film and using them to establish mood and audience

engagement from the opening frames” (p. 16). Title sequences of *Dr. No* (1962) designed by Maurice Binder were noticeably innovative during this period of time as well as Stephen Frankfurt’s creative title designs for *To Kill A Mocking Bird* (1962).



Figure 2.2: Title sequences of *The Man with the Golden Arm*, 1955
Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

Film title design went through a serious change after the 1950s and emerged as modern medium. One of the main reasons for such transformation was the influence of modernism (Kirkham, 2011) as well as innovative design methods developed by designers such as Saul Bass.

2.2.1.3 1980s – Present

Film industry similar to every other aspect of modern life has been affected by computer technology which made the application of visual effects more convenient and affordable. Many different techniques in computer based digital design was developed during the 1980s which widened the field for graphic designers to come up with more creative ideas. Films such as *E.T.* (1982), *Max Dugan Returns* (1983) and *The War of The*

Roses (1989) are examples of the development of title sequence design during the 1980s (Yu, 2008). Film title design was turned into an industry by the late 1970s when Robert and Richard Greenberg founded a commercial production company, R/Greenberg Associates in 1977 (Inceer, 2007). Their company established new and innovative techniques of motion graphics that were inspired by Bauhaus in terms of style and visual appearance; the company “was among the first to approach film-title design as a collaboration of creative talent and technology” (Curran, 2000, p.160) and had a significant impact on film title designs of the following decades. *Alien* (1979) and *The World According to Garp* (1982) are among the incredible works of Richard Greenberg during this era.

During the 1990s film title design became even more advanced as designers learned to apply new digital techniques in making more dynamic typographies. Emergence of new computer softwares such as Adobe After Effect and Macromedia Flash (Yu, 2008) provided the opportunity for designers to experiment their creativity in special effects and produce more communicative animated type for film titles (Bachfischer and Robertson, 2005). Throughout this period of time, film opening credits were designed by actual designers with knowledge of film and technology. In 1995 Kyle Cooper as one of the greatest designers of the time, created the most groundbreaking titles for the film *Seven* (Figure 2.3) which was named by New York Times Magazine as “one of the most important design innovations of the 1990s” (May, 2010). In title credits of this thriller, Cooper created the typography with such appearance and movement that conveyed the tension within the film, as well as inspiring other designers to explore the expressive qualities of moving type (Bachfischer and Robertson, 2005). The influence of Bass’ style was clearly visible throughout the following decades in designing titles for films such as *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005) by Danny Yount.



Figure 2.3: Title sequences of *Se7en*, 1995, Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

Opening credit sequences in films appear in various types and styles. However according to Inceer (2007, p.19) titles can technically be categorized into four groups based on their overall style: 1) Titles that are placed over a blank screen, which normally appear with white type on a black background 2) Titles that are placed over still images, which look more interactive than the simple one 3) Titles that come together with a number of moving images and music, in which there is more opportunity to create symbolic sequences 4) Titles created by motion graphics which are more common after the 1990s.

However the development of technology might have downsides in the creative industry. The expansion of computer technology until this day, provides people with information from every field around the world. However this growing accessibility of information causes overload of data and visual information that results in lack of time for people to process the information and understand them. In terms of visual information, people need more time to perceive their visual presentation in order to be able to appreciate the aesthetic quality of the visual information. If the information is overloaded, people would not appreciate the communicative quality of visual elements, and the visual pleasure would also be weakened by the pressure of short time (Hillner, 2009).

2.2.2 Evolution of Typographic Techniques through the History of Film Titles

In order to study film titles produced in recent years, there was a need to review the evolution of typography through the history of cinema. Typography in film title sequences has been developing along with the growth of cinema and new technology. This study is going to represent a closer look at the development of typographic techniques, from the early years of cinema to the contemporary era.

Motion graphics has faced a significant growth during the 21st century thanks to development of computer technology. This have provided title designers with the chance to experiment new techniques in their title designs and typography for motion pictures and television series or advertisements, and to produce more innovative works. Nowadays title designers are getting more credit and their work is being acknowledged as art. Curran (2000) stated that:

“The optical process moves closer to obsolescence with every advance in digital tools. As more designers do breakout work, respect and demand for good title design is beginning to rise in Hollywood. And as more and more designers like Geoff McFetridge (who designs film titles out of a one-person studio) throw industry convention out the window and discover new ways of working, the rules of the game can change as quickly as the flash of a frame of celluloid.” (p.129)

Even though the development of technology is growing fast in the motion graphic industry, many filmmakers prefer to maintain their conventional styles of film titles, therefore the chance for new technology to completely take over the film title industry is not likely. Using conventional methods of creating typography and title design has the benefit of producing unique artworks. The same softwares and special effects that are easily applicable in the digital world is being used by every designer and this results in producing similar designs. This fact would be considered as a downside of development of technology. By conventional methods, designers are able to produce artworks that signify their distinctive style, and would not be seen in any other designer's works.

The techniques of creating typography has certainly changed thanks to the development of digital techniques and computer graphics. Such technology has provided designers with a great range of animation effects and type design. Softwares such as Adobe After Effects which were developed in the 1990s contain various tools and techniques for animating typography and generating remarkable visual effects with three dimensional features. This provides the groundwork for designers to create title sequences based on desired mood and theme. However there was no such technology during the past century and type designers were only limited to hand lettering, printing techniques and title cards.

During the 1920s and 1930s typography was applied to present the name of the film and other information about the production, cast and crew. Creation of type was mainly based on hand drawing techniques or block printing. The title cards were created and placed over the video footage to display the dialogue or announce the time and place of the scene. Titles for American silent film *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) solely display the name and other credits of the film (Figure 2.4).



Figure 2.4: Title sequence of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925)

In this era typography did not reveal any theme or mood in relation to the film's genre and story. For example, *The Phantom of the Opera* is a mystery horror film but the theme and typography of the title sequences does not imply any horror feeling. If the viewer has no prior information about this film, they could never guess the mood of the film by looking at the title sequence. By comparing this title sequence with more recent horror films, the difference between their typographic styles would reveal the progress of type creating techniques. *Se7en* (1995) (Figure 2.5) is a mystery thriller and *Creep* (2014) (Figure 2.6) is a horror film. By looking at their title credits the viewer can clearly evoke the feeling of distress and fear. The horror theme in the title designs of these two films, is generated through the creation of distorted type effect which implies tension. Other than typography there are other techniques that has been employed to create the thrilling emotion in these title sequences such as shaking camera movement and grungy music in *Se7en*.



Figure 2.5: Title sequence of *Se7en* (1995), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>



Figure 2.6: Title sequence of *Creep* (2014), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

Evolution of typography in title sequences since the 1930s can be observed evidently in three generations of *King Kong* films in 1933, 1976 and 2005. Regardless of the limited technology of the time, typography in the first production of this film in 1933 (Figure 2.7) seems to have more character than the one produced in 1976 (Figure 2.8). Typography in title sequence of *King Kong* (1933) looks rudimentary, however it indicates the strong characteristics of the main protagonist with big block letters; whereas the raw typography in the later version of the film in 1976 does not suggest the same theme. But after three decades of development in graphic techniques, typography of *King Kong* (2005) (Figure 2.9) looks more enhanced in terms of its association to the theme of the film. The three dimensional effects and use of color and texture certainly gives more character to the typography which represents the mood and subject matter of the film. The attempt of creating three dimensional effect can also be seen in the 1933 version of *King Kong* through the use of shadows and lighting in the typography, which is admirable for that era with underdeveloped technology and weak typography techniques comparing to the 21st century.



Figure 2.7: Title sequence of *King Kong* (1933)
Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/news/a-brief-history-of-title-design-announced/>



Figure 2.8: Title sequence of *King Kong* (1976), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>



Figure 2.9: Title sequence of *King Kong* (2005), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

In the 1950s the art of film title design broke the conventional style through the emergence of creative designers such as Saul Bass. His title design for *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1955) was in fact a ground breaking work in terms of design, associating typography with other visual forms in clean compositions (Figure 2.10). The fact that differentiated Saul Bass' works from the designs in the past decades, was his use of typography in a more simple and minimalistic manner, rather than trying to decorate or exaggerate the title sequences. He avoided using unnecessary decorative elements such as the ones in the 1920's and started making clean sequences with minor visual elements which were actually more communicative. Such designs were in fact a huge step forward in the world of graphic design as well as film title design. In his title design in *Anatomy Of A Murder* (1959) he used a simple illustration of a human figure and hand-written typography to display the name of the film (Figure 2.11). Bass applied typography in perspective which follow the angled lines of a building's exterior in title sequences of *North By Northwest* (1959) (Figure 2.12).



Figure 2.10: Title sequence of *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1955), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/news/a-brief-history-of-title-design-announced/>

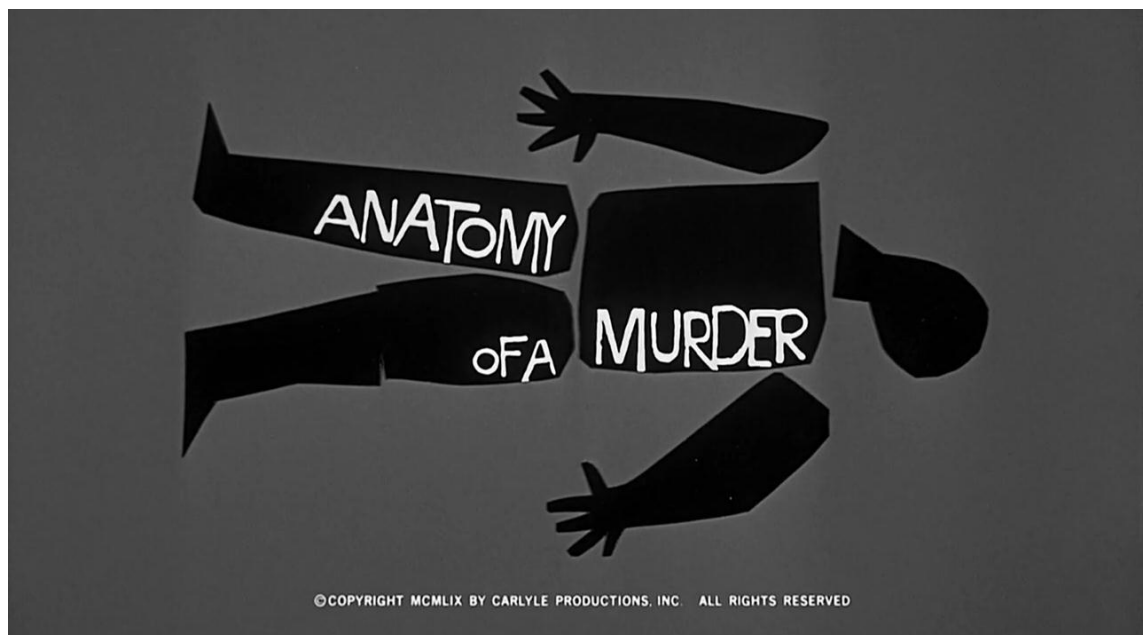


Figure 2.11: Title sequence of *Anatomy Of A Murder* (1959), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/news/a-brief-history-of-title-design-announced/>

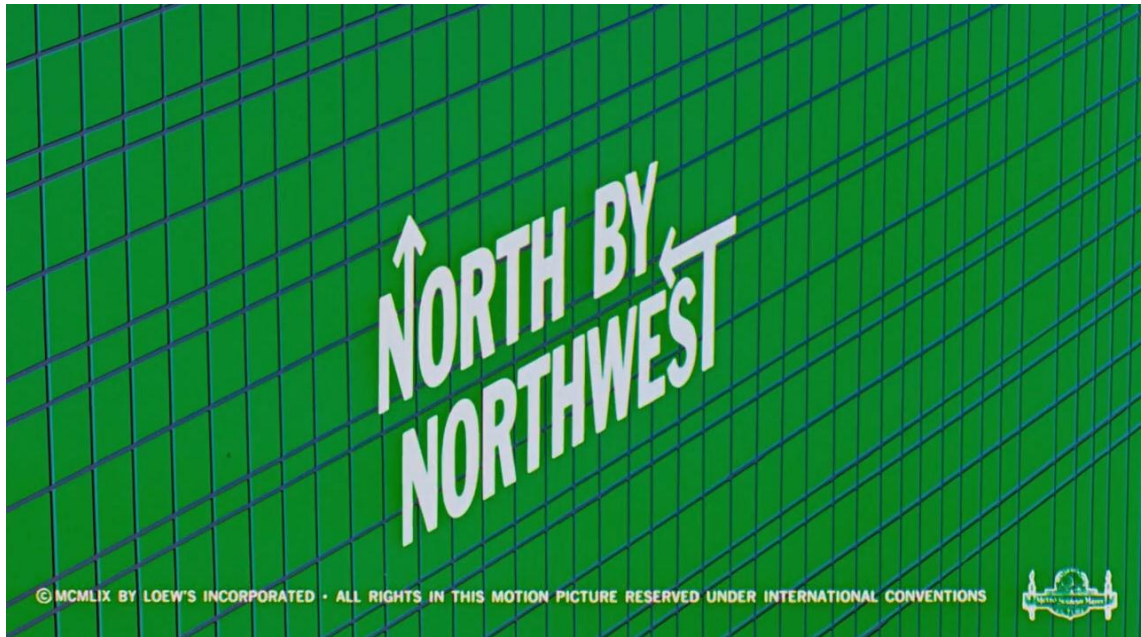


Figure 2.12: Title sequence of *North By Northwest* (1959), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/news/a-brief-history-of-title-design-announced/>

Stephen Frankfurt applied an innovative technique to typography in title sequences of *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962) which was quite trendy at the time (Figure 2.13). Instead of creating graphic title sequences or typing letters on screen he actually filmed the typography in close up shots where letters of 'To Kill a Mockingbird' are revealed as the young girl colors the paper with crayon. This technique of typography is actually avant-garde for its time, considering the fact that it was produced six decades ago. This title design is considered as one of the most influential and innovative techniques of typography in the history of film opening sequences. In the same year another creative innovation occurred in Maurice Binder's title design for *Dr. No* (1962), in which the film's name in the opening sequences appeared as a logo design (Figure 2.14). It was used as the James Bond's 007 movie logo for years later. Typography in Pablo Ferro's title design for *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) was also a creative move in film title designs during the 1960's. His style of typography in this film was unconventional and a breakaway from past techniques. Big but narrow hand written type which fills out the screen from top to bottom, are accompanied by much smaller words on the side and bottom. Figure 2.15

which displays the main title for the film's name, consists of four different sizes of type, but all the same styles. Letters 'DR' are displayed in oversized bold font, hollow with white narrow outlines and clearly seems to have been written by a pen on paper. The letters of 'Strangelove' are shown in the same bold font as 'DR' however they are filled with white color and are displayed in much smaller size, overlaid on top of 'DR' letters. The phrase 'Or how I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb' is displayed in a different size of font with a similar hand-written style which is not bold. The production company's name is placed at the frame's bottom with tiny font. The whole typography looks like a transparent layer which has been placed over the images of airplane.

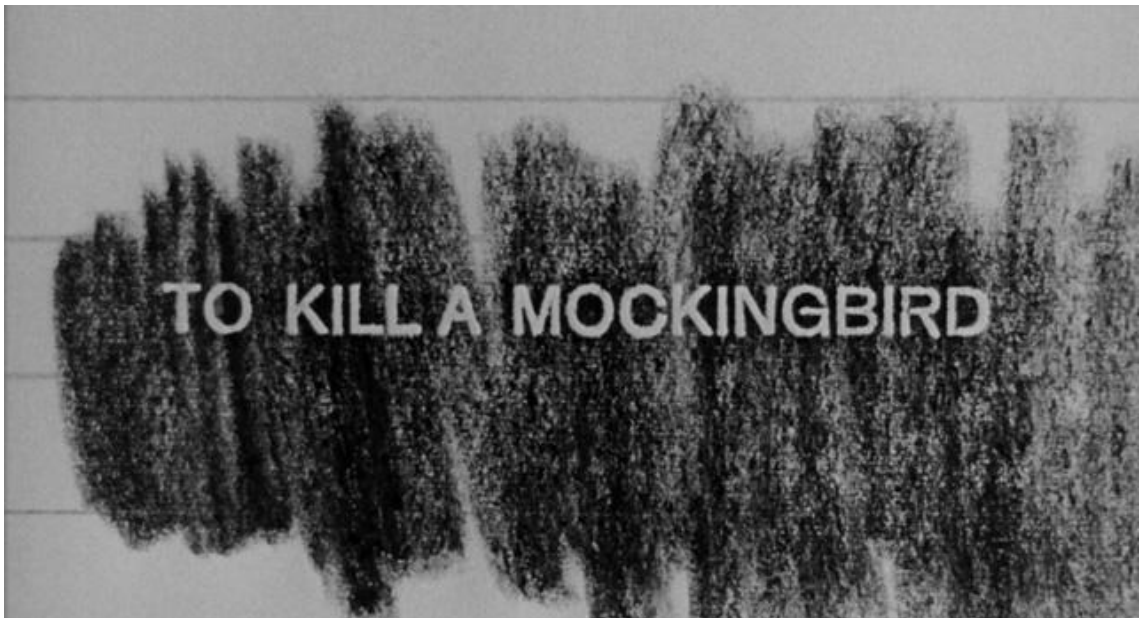


Figure 2.13: Title sequence of *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/news/a-brief-history-of-title-design-announced/>

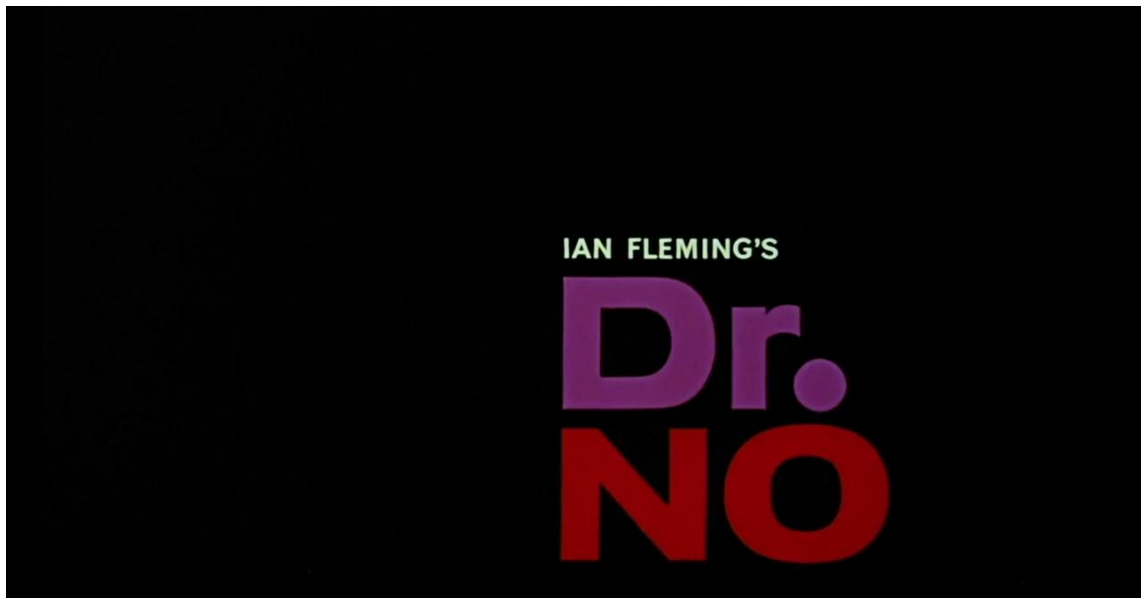


Figure 2.14: Title sequence of *Dr. No* (1962), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/news/a-brief-history-of-title-design-announced/>



Figure 2.15: Title sequence of *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/news/a-brief-history-of-title-design-announced/>

The art of film title design developed further after the 1970s and during the 1980s through the use computer technology. By comparing the title designs for two science fiction films *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986) we can witness the development of computer

graphic within a decade. Richard Greenberg designed the titles for *Alien* (1979) in a rather modern fashion where small pieces of ‘Alien’ letters appear on the top edge of the frame one by one as the title sequences go through the cast names (Figure 2.16). Although this title design was graphically impressive at the time, but comparing to the titles of *Aliens* less than a decade later, it is visually underdeveloped. The title design for *Aliens* was one of the first computer generated title designs in 1980’s which appears more futuristic and modern (Figure 2.17). The letters come into focus in glowing blue color and the letter ‘I’ in the middle becomes extremely radiant with bright blue rays. This effect was generated thanks to the development of digital technology, and through this effect the designer was able to truly convey the science fiction theme of the film which clearly cannot be perceived as good in the titles of *Alien* (1979).



Figure 2.16: Title sequence of *Alien* (1979), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>



Figure 2.17: Title sequence of *Aliens* (1986), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

During the 1990s various innovations occurred in the world of film title design as technology was growing faster day by day and provided new ground for designers. Stylized typography is the most significant improvement during this decade. As discussed earlier, typography of title sequences for *Se7en* (1995) by Kyle Cooper is well known as one of the most creative styles during the 1990s. The distressed typography represented the essence of the thriller film (Figure 2.5). Cooper's title design for *Flubber* (1997) also has an interesting typography that reveals the true notion of the film. The credits are stylized with chemistry and mathematic signs and characters, which makes the typography look like math equations (Figure 2.18). Another stylized typography during the 1990s is the title design for *Dead Man* (1995) where alphabetical letters are structured with bone shaped pieces (Figure 2.19). Generating such techniques had not been possible in the earlier decades when computer graphics was not as developed as it was during the 1990s.

Creating three dimensional typography was another important achievement during this decade. Titles of *Speed* (1994) appear in three dimensional environment of an elevator shaft (Figure 2.20). The typography itself has three dimensional effect and the movement

of the letters toward the camera also imply the illusion of depth and space. The development of computer graphics continued significantly during the 2000s which has had amazing results until this day.



Figure 2.18: Title sequence of *Flubber* (1997), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>



Figure 2.19: Title sequence of *Dead Man* (1995), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>



Figure 2.20: Title sequence of *Speed* (1994), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

After Saul Bass in the 1950s and Pablo Ferro in the 1960s broke the new ground in the world of title design, it was Kyle Cooper who managed to draw a major attention to his work by designing the famous title sequence for *Se7en* (1995). His impactful approach to this title design was unique in terms of application of scratchy effects to typography which was never before applied in design as an aesthetic feature (Figure 2.3 and 2.5). For achieving this effect, Cooper hand wrote the typography on celluloid and spread the ink in order to create a scratchy and handmade look. He then gathered slideshows and photographs of crime scenes together with the title cards to imply the mood of the thriller film. “We photographed books and shadows and mapped it all out with stills to get an idea of what it would look like when you see through the pages and you see the shadows behind the page and the backlight” (Cooper, 1995, *Art of Title*). His style of typography and overall look of the title sequence broke the conventional rules of title design of the time. Cooper explained that the director David Fincher had asked him to generate the hand drawn style for the title sequences as it would represent the mind of the killer; as if the killer himself had visualized the typography and title sequence (Cooper, 1995).

Kyle Cooper’s title design was considered as the beginning of a new style in the motion graphics field, just similar to what Saul Bass did in the 1950s with his title design for *The*

Man With The Golden Arm. Since the 1990s many designers were inspired by Cooper's innovative style of typography and applied it into their title designs for horror and thriller films (for example *Creep* 2014).

Another creative title design in recent years which is unique in terms of technique and overall appearance is the opening title credits for Gaspar Noe's *Enter The Void* (2009) designed by Tom Kan (Figure 2.21). The movie is a drama which shows rather disturbing and out-of-this-world events, and the unrelenting typographic visuals in the title sequences perfectly represent such theme. Director Gaspar Noe uses typography as "filmic device" in his films, and in this film as well typography plays an essential role "as a means of expressing the film's dark vision" (Poynor, 2010, ¶5). In an interview with Art Of Title, the title designer Tom Kan explained the process of his typographic design. The director had asked him to create a "fast-paced compilation of typefaces, all very different, inspired by films, flyers, and neon signs to announce the tone of the film" (Kan, 2009, ¶2). As the title credits are displayed in many different typefaces (Figure 2.27), in terms of the choice of typeface Kan mentioned that he had chosen various typefaces in relation to the film's mood, and for each name they chose the typeface that best represented their character as the director "wanted each title to reflect the person it concerned" (Kan, 2009, ¶3).

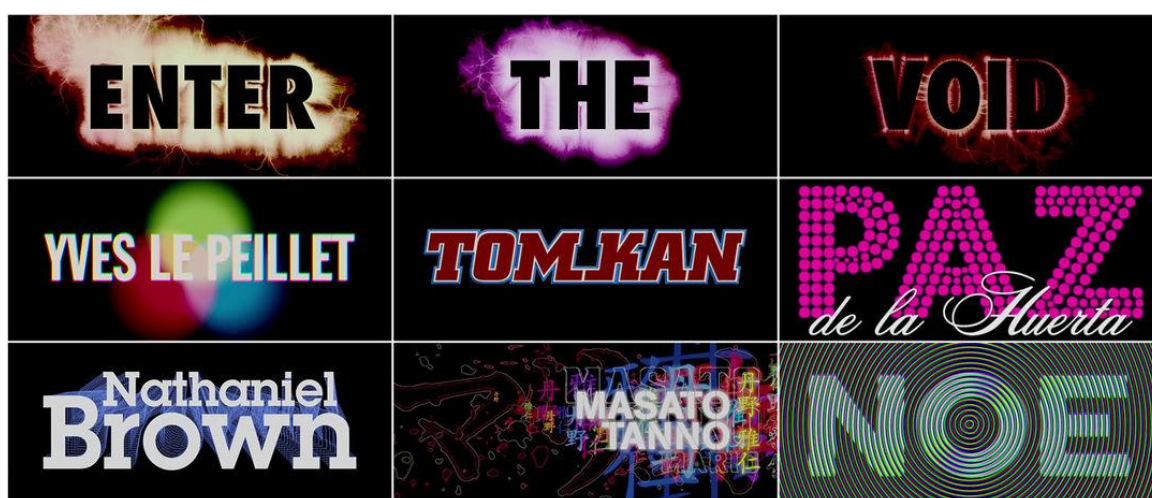


Figure 2.21: Title sequence of *Enter The Void* (2009), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/enter-the-void/>

In terms of typography techniques Kan experimented many design tricks such as shadows, 3D effect, neon colors, distorted layers (Figure 2.22) and he also used Japanese type characters as the film takes place in Tokyo. The purpose of such visualization was to display the thrilling atmosphere of Tokyo's nightlife with neon lightings, logos, loud music, chaos, drugs, sex and violence “a place where spiritual compasses can easily spin out of control” (Poynor, 2010, ¶7). This idea in fact points out to the main subject matter of the film which shows how people suffer from the consequences of their uncontrolled instinctive desires such as use of drugs and sexual promiscuity, which are issues that has been addressed in the film.



Figure 2.22: Design process of typography for title sequences of *Enter The Void* (2009), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/enter-the-void/>

The most important part of the title design process was the typography of the film's name 'Enter The Void' which was created through the interesting technique of electrophotography also known as Kirlian photography (Figure 2.23 and 2.24). This technique uses high voltage electricity current to capture images with electrical coronal discharge around them on a metal plate. Typographic letters of 'Enter The Void' were

cut from cardboard and wrapped in aluminum foil and shot by electrophotography technique (Figure 2.25), they were later digitally manipulated in order to enhance the color and apply animation effects (Figure 2.26). Such technique is rarely used for creating typography, and has not been used in any other film title design; therefore application of this technique is one of the factors that makes the title design for *Enter The Void* unique and extremely eye-catching.



Figure 2.23: Electrophotography technique for title sequences of *Enter The Void* (2009), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/enter-the-void/>

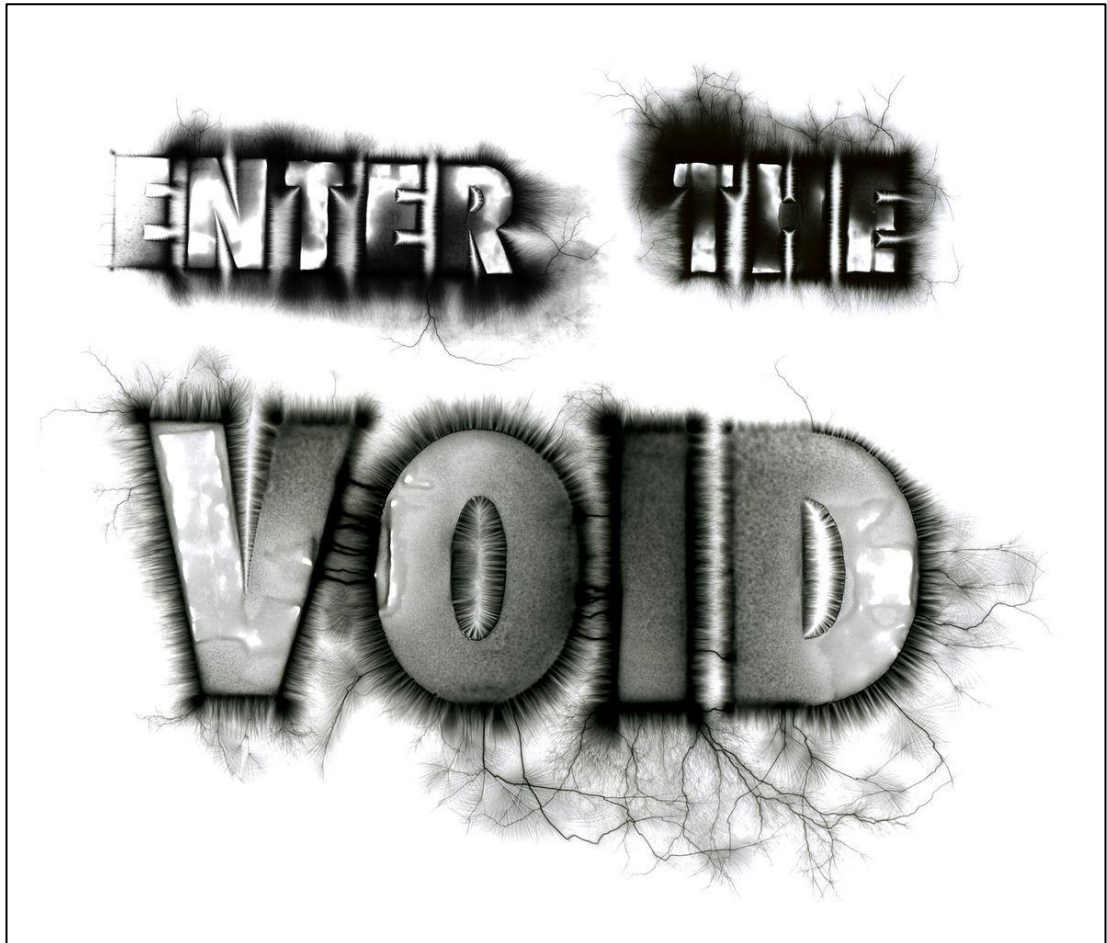


Figure 2.24: Electrophotography technique for title sequences of *Enter The Void* (2009), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/enter-the-void/>



Figure 2.25 Electrophotography technique for title sequences of *Enter The Void* (2009), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/enter-the-void/>

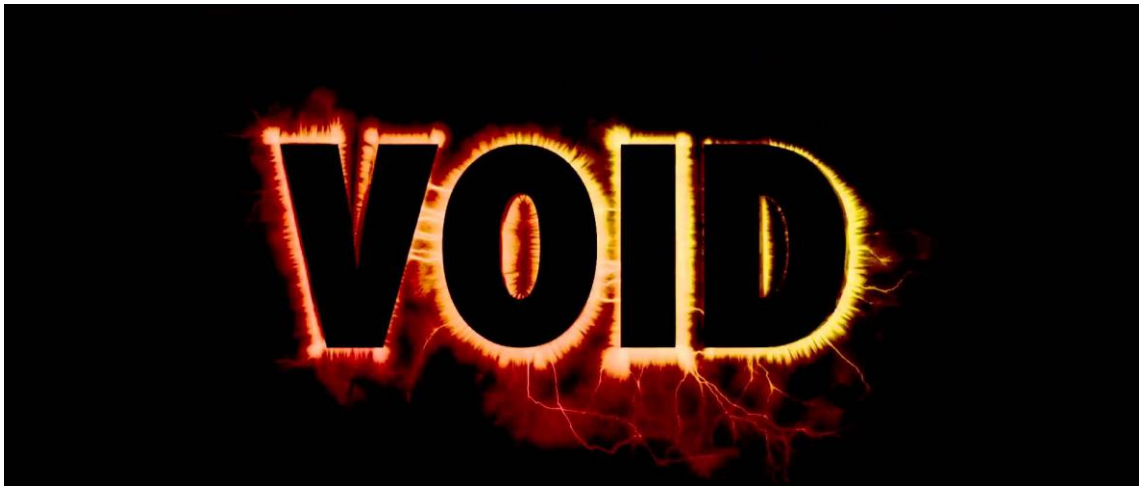


Figure 2.26 Electrophotography technique for title sequences of *Enter The Void* (2009), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/enter-the-void/>

The process of design and creation of typography for *Enter The Void* (2009) might seem conventional in terms of techniques, but after watching the title sequences, viewers would certainly not feel like they have watched a conventional piece. Other than typography, the editing technique and use of music play a crucial role in generating a creative and unique title design. Such style of title sequences has not been employed in many films before, which is why this particular film has been chosen to discuss in this study. In addition it provides an example that clearly indicates the development of film title design through the past decades.



Figure 2.27: Title sequence design of *Enter The Void* (2009), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/enter-the-void/>

The purpose of this investigation was to understand how creation and application of typography has evolved through the history of filmmaking. Such understanding was essential throughout this study, as it helped with the analysis of the typography and its perceptual features. During the investigation of typography in film titles over the past

century, it was figured that typography mostly served as decorative and informative purpose in early 20th century film titles. It was only after the 1950s that typography became more important as a communicative visual element in film opening sequences. This was actually the era that graphic design was being developed, and it certainly affected typography in any context. Attention to color, composition and association with other visual elements in typography did not occur in film titles until the 1950s.

The initial reason for development of typography and graphic design in the mid-20th century was of course the growth of technology and digital facilities which allowed film title designers explore new techniques of creating typography as well as animation effects. In addition to the development of technology, the major evolution in the typography design of film titles during the 1950s happened thanks to designers such as Saul Bass. During this era, title design was not just about informing the viewers about the cast and crew or decoration; it was in fact about the art of graphic design and visual communication. After the 1950s film titles began to look simpler with clean layouts, with more legible composition and framing, as well as more dynamic; and all such changes were influenced by the innovative designs of Saul Bass.

Having caused a shift in the world of film title design, Saul Bass was heavily influenced by Gestalt theory. The influence of Gestalt theory can be seen in the simplicity of his designs as well as the use of geometric and abstract forms. As Horak (2014, p. 54) explained, after being exposed to Gestalt theory, Bass's designs became more "dynamic" and "abstract". Deeper elaboration of Gestalt theory's impact on Saul Bass is provided later in this chapter. Based on the investigation on evolution of film title sequences in the past hundred years, it is realized that Saul Bass was a major influence in this field who made a significant shift in film title design in the 1950s. Bass's designs were heavily influenced by Gestalt theory of visual perception as he has been taught by Gyorgy Kepes

one of the developers of this theory. Therefore, it can be claimed that the big shift in the history of film title design is influenced by Gestalt theory.

2.2.3 Gestalt Theory of Visual Perception

Gestalt psychology began in Germany in 1910 and was developed in the 1920's by three German psychologists Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler (Behrens, 1998). "Gestalt" is a German word which means "configuration" (Brownie, 2008). This theory emerged in the field of psychology, however many artists and designers have shown interest towards Gestalt laws of perception as they developed "a scientific method explaining human perception and our tendency to 'group' things". The main purpose of Gestalt theory is to define the perception of visual images as 'wholes'; Wertheimer (1924) explains the fundamental formula of Gestalt theory as: "There are wholes, the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole" (p.2). Max Wertheimer's visual research, in particular, explored why some images seem to belong together as part of a unit or group while others seem separate (Brownie, 2008, p.1). Generally Gestalt theory "refers to a structure, configuration, or layout that is unified and has specific properties that are greater than the simple sum of its individual parts" (Brownie, 2008, p.1).

The term Gestalt generally means form and manner which was applied in Gestalt psychology to imply a pattern or whole. In order to understand the true essence of the word Gestalt, "three phenomena must be considered: a thing, its context or environment, and the relationship between them. We perceive something that constitutes a part of the reality of our world in terms of the context in which it occurs" (Kolb, Gorrell, & De Riet, 1989, p.1). This means that we have different response and interpretations if an object is placed in different contexts. Therefore the environment where the objects are being

depicted, directly affects our visual judgment. In terms of Gestalt psychology, it has been argued that visual perception occurs based on organized patterns and wholes rather than individual parts (Kohler, 1992).

The fundamental idea behind the Gestalt theory of perception on the relationship between the visual elements and their surrounding environment was based on three basic principles about pattern construction (Wertheimer, 1938): 1) Objects that are closer to one another are likely to be perceived as a pattern 2) Objects that are similar in shape or color are likely to be perceived as a pattern 3) “when individual objects form groups or subgroups, such groups or subgroups tend to be established as are, qua groups, particularly simple, symmetrical, and smooth,...often recognized as in simplest aesthetics.” (Kohler, 1969, p.56-58)

Gestalt laws of perception provide designers a consistent framework based on psychological facts which can help them improve the spatial organization of visual elements (Clark, 1999). According to Desolneux, Moisan and Morel (2006) the global Gestalt principles have been extracted into two major groups: 1) The parts of an image inherit the overall group qualities 2) The whole image is different from sum of its parts; which is divided into eight principles:

1. Proximity
2. Similarity
3. Common Fate
4. Prägnanz
5. Continuation
6. Closure
7. Equilibrium
8. Figure and Ground

Figure and ground relationship is one of the fundamental principles of Gestalt theory. This principle explains the appearance and order of the visual forms and it “is the basic perceptual principle of making the wholes of human needs or experiences meaningful” (Clarkson, 2000, p.6). Any object or pattern is considered as the figure, whereas ground identifies the background, context or environment of the figure. We unconsciously tend to see the figures prior to the ground (Figure 2.28) and “our attention shifts from one figure of interest to another, and when we are no longer interested in one figure, it recedes into the ground and is replaced by another” (Polster & Polster, 1973, p.31).

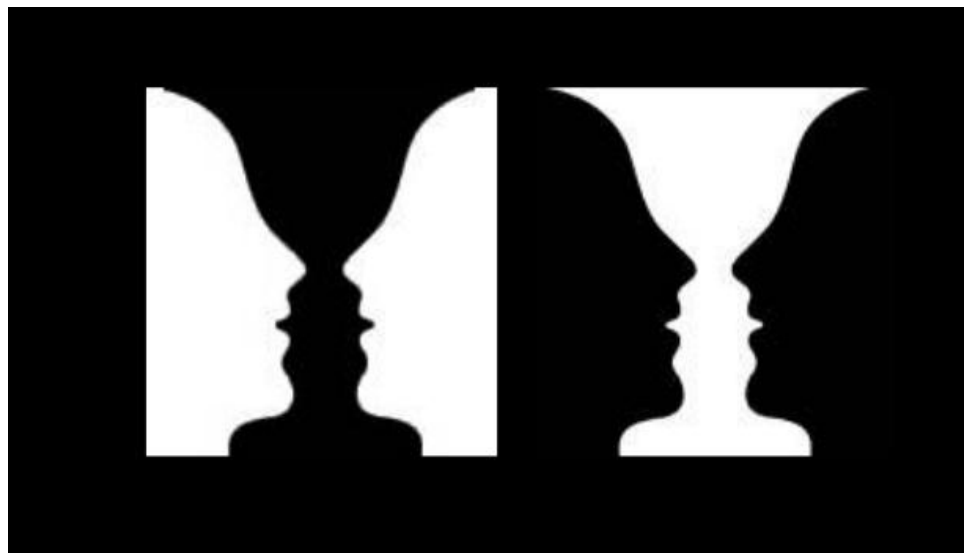


Figure 2.28: Gestalt principle of Figure/Ground relationship,
Source: <http://www.slideshare.net/luisaepv/the-gestalt-laws-of-perception>

Closure is another crucial aspect of perception which has been approached by Gestalt Theory. It explains how we unconsciously tend to make sense of and incomplete or unrecognizable figure. For example we recognize the letter ‘G’ in Figure 2.29 whereas there has been no complete form of a letter shown in the picture. Our eye automatically closes the gaps and creates a presumptive connection between the unconnected areas.



Figure 2.29: Gestalt principle of Closure,
Source: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/7771783/Gestalt-Theory-Letter-Form-Combinations>

Furthermore Max Wertheimer (1924, p.2) explained that Gestalt theory works similarly as a mathematical formula which “is not an independent closed fact” and cannot be “dealt with for itself alone”. He clarifies that this ‘formula’ must be applied in terms of “its dynamic *functional* relationship to whole from which it was lifted” or it will not be applicable (Wertheimer, 1924, p.2). In other words Gestalt theory suggests that human eyes automatically recognize figures by their outlines and silhouettes, and separates them into light and dark objects in order to make a whole image. Simply put, the main statement of Gestalt theory (the whole is different from sum of its parts) clarifies that we tend to perceive images as a whole general figure instead of seeing their separate parts such as lines, shapes or dots.

2.2.3.1 Influence of Gestalt Theory on Saul Bass

Saul Bass has been mainly influenced by his teacher Gyorgy Kepes and his book *The Language of Vision* on the theory of art in which he acknowledges the previous works of Gestalt psychologists Wertheimer, Koffka and Kohler. Gestalt generally employs human senses and perception in order to discover the visual language as well as relying on the theory that the *whole* is greater than the sum of its parts whether in art or in nature (p.53).

The Language of Vision offered a simple international system of the visual language as well as a “scientific world view of art” providing simple and straight forward solutions for visual communication, which resulted in “more dynamic and more abstract” designs in Bass’s works (p.54). All design solutions offered by Kepes were based on one common concept which explains how human eye associates with visual spaces (seeing them as a *whole*) and that every visual field includes a composition of design elements in space which have interaction with the background space through their visual features such as color, size or texture (p.55). What inspired Bass the most in *The Language of Vision* was the use of geometric shapes in terms of creating dynamic visual fields as well as “guiding the eye toward the design’s most important message” (p.55).

Another factor that influenced Bass in *The Language of Vision* was the concept of “reduction” and “simplicity” which became known as his signature style or brand (p.56). This was probably the most important concept that inspired Bass in designing his logos, posters and most significantly the title sequences, resulting in his use of simplified shapes and “metaphorical images” (p.57). Founded on simplicity and “emotional appeal” Bass’s brand emphasized on leaving enough open space for the text or graphic elements in the visual field allowing them to create their own “dynamic force” (p.64). Bass never tried to decorate the design by adding additional distracting elements that would result in the complication of the message.

In his book *Saul Bass: Anatomy Of Film Design*, Horak (2014) deeply explains the influence of Gestalt theory on Saul Bass and how it changed his designs. As Kepes provided broad guidelines for communication and design solutions in his book, after Bass’s exposure to Kepes words, his designs became more “dynamic” and “abstract” (Horak, 2014, p. 54). In terms of composition and design elements “Kepes taught Bass that the visual field of any design consists of objects placed in space, where color, brightness, texture, size and the relationship of points, lines, and areas create spatial forces

that interact with the background. The eye assimilates these various spatial forces and organizes their visual differences into a whole” (Horak, 2014, p. 55). As mentioned earlier, “dynamic” features appeared in Bass’s works after being exposed to Kepes and his principles. One factor in Kepes’ book that was a major influence to Bass was the use of geometric shapes. He learned that using geometric elements such as lines, squares and circles on a blank background can be visually impactful in a design. He figured that such shapes “not only manifest dynamic movement by creating actual force fields, depending on their placement, but also become powerful tools in guiding the eye toward the design’s most important message” (Horak, 2014, p. 55). Influence of this principle can clearly be detected in Bass’s title design for *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1955) and *Psycho* (1960).

In his book, Kepes explained that in contemporary environments there exists too many visual stimulation which is distracting because of the human’s short attention period. Therefore “it becomes necessary to pare down details to their essential shape and meaning” (Horak, 2014, p.56). Based on this principle, Bass applied a reductive method in producing his art works and mostly intended to simplify his designs. He started using “logo-like, reductive metaphorical images” in his title designs and other commercial works (Horak, 2014, p.57). Kepes (1969) clarified that human’s visual perception is not just about sensory stimulation, as it is more about subjectivity in the viewer’s memory. The simpler the visual elements become, the longer they stay in the memory of the observer.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter represent a theoretical framework by going through the principles of Gestalt theory of perception and formalism within film theory, and revealing the common ideas that are shared between the two chosen theories. The theoretical framework provides the groundwork for analysis of typography in film titles in Chapter 4.

3.1 Gestalt and Typography

Gestalt theory has been significant in the field of art and design and its visual principles have been applied in various two dimensional works in order to improve visual communication (Brownie, 2008). Applying Gestalt theory in design helps bring together the visual elements and results in a more unified, coherent and complete design. Designers apply Gestalt principles in their visual products such as posters, photographs, book covers and magazines in order to improve their overall layout and perception. However only a minor number of studies have been focusing precisely on the application of Gestalt principles to typography. Therefore this study aims to investigate the application of Gestalt visual principles to typography within the context of films' opening titles in order to enhance the use of these principles by typographers and to encourage further academic elaboration on this field.

From what has been written on fundamentals of Gestalt theory, it is understood that the main focus is on how grouped objects (small sums set inside one environment) are perceived or interpreted as a whole (Brownie, 2012); and they mainly share the concern of 'the predominance of the whole over the parts' which suggests that viewer's perception of any visual element depends on the environment it is located in (Murray, 1995, p.1). Theories of Gestalt generally are divided into two basic principles, one is the 'bundle hypothesis' which suggests that 'every complex consists of elementary contents' and the second one is the 'association hypothesis' suggesting that if 'any object is frequently experienced alongside another, there is a tendency for one to call up the other'

(Wertheimer, 1924, p.12). Here Brownie (2012, p.100) suggests that the first rule applies to lettering and typography practice, where letterforms are considered as ‘complex wholes’ consisting of smaller parts, and similarly words are considered as wholes containing letters as smaller parts. According to Brownie (2012, p.101) Gestalt theories of visual perception which can be applied into typography studies, can be found in Wertheimer’s *Laws of Organisation in Perceptual Forms* (1923). These laws explain how individuals are perceived as smaller parts of a bigger whole:

- *Proximity*

This principle is about how close elements are to one another. It states that elements that are located close to each other are perceived as a group or being associated to one another (Wertheimer, 1923, p.74). Proximity defines the relationship between the objects and determines their unity. This principle is highly effective in design and typography in particular as it affects how we read and perceive words; it can also be applied to create depth of field.

- *Similarity*

Elements that have similar visual assets such as form or color are perceived as being associated together; In other words, similar looking figures are seen as related (Wertheimer, 1923, p.75). Visual elements that look exactly alike, create unity and are perceived as a group or pattern. Dissimilar elements in a composition are perceived as belonging apart and create a point of emphasis and attract attention.

- *Equilibrium*

Gestalt principle of *Equilibrium* explains that our eye tends to find balance in every visual composition, and this sense of balance significantly affects

our visual perception (Wertheimer, 1923). Lack of balance in a visual composition may influence the message it is intended to imply.

- *Common Fate*

Elements moving in the same direction are perceived as being associated to one another (Wertheimer, 1923, p.78). All objects that are pointed to a same direction or moving with the same speed are considered as a whole. If there is one element among them that is moving to another direction or does not follow the other elements, that would be the point that draws most attention.

- *Prägnanz or Simplicity*

Complex arrangements are perceived in the simplest form possible. When a series of complex images are presented, human eyes tend to interpret them as parts of a simple whole (Butler, et. al, 2003). However our past experience affects the perception of forms as familiar or simple (Rock, 1975).

- *Continuity*

Elements that are arranged on a line or curve are likely to be perceived as being associated (Rock, 1975). Our eyes tend to perceive figures by a smooth continuity rather than unexpected paths or change of directions. Continuation is applied in order to lead the eye to a point of focus. It occurs when the eye moves from one element to another.

- *Closure*

Our eye tends to complete the shapes that are close together with a gap in between (by closing the gap), perceiving them as one group, however in all cases this might not be the dominant factor (Wertheimer, 1923, p.81). In case of incomplete or distorted figures, we prefer to see them as closed shapes by mentally connecting them together and filling in the gaps.

- *Figure and Ground*

This principle of Gestalt, explains how human eye separates whole figures from their surrounding background based on various aspects such as size, lightness or darkness (contrast), color and movement (Wertheimer, 1923). This is in fact how we differentiate negative and positive space. The formal elements are often perceived as the figure, and their surrounding environment is known as the ground. The figure/ground relationship and balance affect how clear they are perceived by viewers.

Brownie (2012) mentions a few scholars who have analyzed the effects of Wertheimer's Gestalt laws on typography; and among all those laws, the effects of *Similarity* and *Proximity* seem to be more significant in typographic layouts such as documents. Straatsma (2009) suggests that "the principles of proximity and similarity can be used to indicate relations among text elements information that is associated should have a similar typographic layout and/ or be put close together" (p.34). In relation to *Similarity* Straatsma clarifies that "the similarity in typography tells the reader that all headings serve a similar function: providing topic information about the text it belongs to" (2009, p.34). Cuenca (2000) also discussed how factors of *Similarity* and *Proximity* affect typography in terms of its function and readability. He revealed the impact of *Similarity* in text documents by explaining how difference in visual characteristics of text such as size, color, typeface, weight or case would affect their functionality on a page; as texts with similar characteristics would be assumed to have the same function. He clarified that the space between the words must be larger than the space between the letters in order to become readable, which explains the factor of *Proximity*. Lidwell, Holden and Butler (2010) investigated how *Proximity* would have an impact on the legibility of the overall layout of texts, however the letterforms have not been observed individually regarding to this factor.

Perception as a crucial part of visual comprehension, has a significant role in every theory related to art. Gestalt theory is almost entirely based on perception; whereas film theory also discuss perceptual facts generally under the topic of *mise-en-scene*. Gestalt has played a significant role in the history of formalism and film theory, as formalist film theorists tended to rely on Gestalt in their discussions of film perception. Film theorists Bordwell and Thompson (2007) refer to Rudolf Arnheim's conception of Gestalt in order to argue that shapes and movements are capable of communicating feelings. According to them, Arnheim went beyond the boundaries of Gestalt conception and claimed that geometrical forms carry an expressive nature, giving an example of a triangle placed on a surface, which is not only a balanced composition but it is heavy, and a tall building conveys an aggressive upwards force (Bordwell and Thompson, 2007).

3.2 Formalism within Film Theory

In film criticism as well as art, formalism is a theory used to describe the formal elements within the work of art. In film, this theory analyses the formal elements such as set composition, lighting, color and editing techniques and describes the emotional effects of such elements (Andrew, 1984). Formalism in film analyses structure of the film and how forms create such structures. The formal elements in a film, help create the film's narrative as well as conveying certain meanings. In opposed to realistic films that show the events as they happen in real life, formalistic films may seem abstract or symbolic as formalist filmmakers tend to create specific emotions by portraying certain compositions (Andrew, 1984). Many critics such as Rudolf Arnheim claim that formalist film is a piece of art, whereas realist film merely portrays real life events. As Giannetti (2008, p.4) describes, formalists display "their subjective experience of reality, not how other people might see it. Formalists are often referred to as expressionists, because their selfexpression is at least as important as the subject matter itself". In general, formalists

refer to cinema as an artistic medium that manipulates reality, and represents events in a more abstract manner.

The film's *mise-en-scene* as one of the cinematography techniques, is an important part to focus in relation to formalist analysis as it explains various uses of composition, color, size and emphasis of the formal elements in relation to the film's meaning. The film's use of *mise-en-scene* directly affects the viewer's perception of visual elements and leads to further interpretation of the film. Framing and the use of different shots in films are important factors of formalism that create a close relation between the viewer and the emotional message of the film (Giannetti, 2008). As it is discussed later in this research, various types of shots (medium shot, long shot, close-up, etc.) or framings and compositions are employed by filmmakers to portray the film based on their imagination as well as developing the story by emotionally engaging the audience. Formalist filmmakers appear to be more expressive with the style and "form" of film rather than portraying the reality or its "content" (Giannetti, 2008, p.5).

As it has been mentioned, this research is focused on communicative value of typography rather than its informative aspect. The terms 'information design' and 'communication design' are different in the creative industry, in terms of "how virtual typography stimulates the viewer's senses" (Hillner, 2009, p.54). In the digital world, designers have the ability to create typography not only from ready-made fonts, but out of formal shapes and lines. Typography can actually appear in forms of abstract and graphic patterns which would be perceived as visually attractive by the viewer and result in aesthetic pleasure (Hillner, 2009). If the alphabetical letters are broken down into pieces we could see that they are made out of lines and dots which are formal elements. Therefore type can be considered as a formal element in design.

3.2.1 Rudolf Arnheim

Rudolf Arnheim was a German art and film theorist and a Gestalt psychologist; one of the people who developed formalist film theory in the 1930s and declared that “vision in general, and film viewing in particular is primarily a mental phenomenon” (Stam, 2000, p.60). Arnheim is known as a formalist because he paid close attention to the formal elements of an artwork “in order to describe and understand the work itself” (Argenton, 2015, p.225). In his book *Art and Visual Perception* he explains the psychology of perceptual balance, how composition of forms affects visual perception, as well as detailed descriptions of shape and form (Argenton, 2015). Arnheim (1974) defines *shape* in two assets: “1. the actual boundaries produced by the artist: the lines, masses, volumes, and 2. the structural skeleton created in perception by these material shapes, but rarely coinciding with them” (p.93) and derives the meaning of *form* based on the definition of *shape* by explaining that “form is the visible shape of a content” and “Whenever we perceive shape, consciously or unconsciously we take it to represent something and thereby to be the form of a content” (Arnheim, 1974, p.96).

Arnheim’s ideas on Gestalt perception developed his formalist film theory; as he figured out perception is the most important factor in film theory because the viewer understands the film by visual sense (Stam, 2000). Here it is understood how formalism in film studies is originally derived from Gestalt psychology of perception; as viewer initially perceives formal elements such as shapes, lines and dots as a ‘whole’ form. The main idea of Gestalt psychology is perceiving the ‘wholeness’ of visual images by human eye; and this ‘wholeness’ is structured by formal elements. As a result, how visual structures are understood by the viewer as a whole, is much more important than what is represented to them (Stam, 2000). Arnheim declared that form is adapted in Gestalt perception, as Gestalt “is a field whose forces are organized in a self-contained, balanced whole. In a Gestalt, components interact to the extent that changes in the whole influence

the nature of the parts, and vice versa” (Arnheim, 1988, p.226). Arnheim believed that film combines art and reality and it is able to represent reality in a way that is not seen in everyday life; and that is the artistic value of film (Stam, 2000, p.33).

Visual perception is a dynamic experience in human mind, and because of such experience we are able to recognize forms and their meanings; it is the same when we look at art. Arnheim defines a work of art as a “human artifact intended to represent such dynamic aspects by means of ordered, balanced, concentrated form” (Arnheim, 1988, p.225). This statement means, if visual forms are represented with balance and order, a visual pleasure is created in our mind which is called ‘art’. Arnheim’s attention to the artistic structure of film and its expressive quality has led him to what Dudley Andrew has called “formalist tradition” of film theory (Dhir, 2011).

In his book *Art and Visual Perception*, Arnheim (1974) emphasized that all humans share a similar visual experience of art as all Gestalt principles (Similarity, Proximity, Figure and Ground, Pragnanz, Continuation, Simplicity and Closure) play an important role in human visual perception regardless of time and culture. This clarifies the fact that regardless of our race or cultural background, we all perceive visual elements based on same psychology in our brain, therefore it does not matter what language we speak, we all visually perceive the language of art the same way. This discussion also applies to visualization of typography in film title sequences. Regardless of the textual meaning of the typography, the viewer perceives the inner meaning and visual message of the typography according to the Gestalt psychology of visual perception.

3.3 *Mise-en-scene*

The French term “*mise-en-scene*” (pronounced meez on sen) is referred to the placement of the visual elements within the frame (Giannetti, 2007) and everything that is visible on the screen (Corrigan and White, 2012). *Mise-en-scene*, also known as “staging” is an important part of film theory in relation to composition and visual

perception. It signifies the general appearance of the scene and affects the viewer's emotional response (Barsam, 2007). *Mise-en-scene* explains the structure of the image: staging of the visual elements, their location within the frame, composition and design, domination of the elements, the use of space, movement, open and closed forms, proxemic patterns and depth are the topics that explains the visual understanding of the scenes (Giannetti, 2007). In fact the term *mise-en-scene* explains how all the formal elements of design (cinema) “contribute to your interpretation of a film's meaning” (Barsam, 2007, p.3). “*Mise en scène* in the movies resembles the art of painting in that an image of formal patterns and shapes is presented on a flat surface and is enclosed within a frame” however in cinema, the visual elements of *mise-en-scene* have temporal nature (Giannetti, 2007, p.50).

Bordwell and Thompson (2010, p.119) define *mise-en-scene* as “a term to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame so that the director stages the event for the camera.” In addition to such definition, they have describe this term as what the audience remember of that film after watching it, and this indicated that *mise-en-scene* is not just the appearance of elements inside a frame, but a series of staged events that is recalled by the viewers. “Of all the techniques of cinema, *mise-en-scene* is the one with which we are most familiar. After seeing a film, we may not recall the cutting or the camera movement, the dissolves or the off-screen sound, but we will almost surely recall items of *mise-en-scene*” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010, p.119).

The key features of *mise-en-scene* are generally recognized as setting, lighting, costume, composition, space and movement, which are all associated with one another in order to make certain meanings related to a film's narrative (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010, p.135). Therefore *mise-en-scene* offers “formal principles” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010, p.142) to create a meaningful and continuous narrative of a film. The authors Bordwell and Thompson have applied a formalist theory of *mise-en-scene* in

order to create a comprehensive narration of film and show that elements of *mise-en-scene* play a crucial role in story telling (Stam, 1992). *Mise-en-scene* completes the film's narration as it is able to affect the viewer's perception towards the story (Kolker, 1988).

3.3.1 A Brief History of *Mise-en-scene*

Cinematic *mise-en-scene* originated from western theatre practice which was majorly developed in the nineteenth century. Thanks to the technological developments during the 19th century, filmmakers in the early 1900s started to employ theatrical *mise-en-scene* in films (lighting, settings, costumes and make-up) to generate movie characters and design the stage (Corrigan and White, 2012). However there were no technologies for artificial lighting during the 19th century, and natural light as the only source they were able to use for filming. In the early 20th century, studio filming was possible thanks to the creation of indoor lighting technology (Corrigan and White, 2012). Interior decoration and costume design were other factors that improved cinematic *mise-en-scene* during the 20th century. Studio filmmaking technology was growing during the 1920s and 1930s in America and Europe by building massive constructions and designing the sets for filming (Corrigan and White, 2012). From 1940s to 1970s another trend overtook the studio *mise-en-scene* techniques, which was the realistic *mise-en-scene* that used real outdoor spaces in order to create more recognizable and realistic scenes in filmmaking. The cinematography techniques after the 1970s to present time, have been improved majorly under the influence computer graphics and digital system. The realistic *mise-en-scene* of the 1940s is now created by computer system in more advanced fashion (Corrigan and White, 2012).

Mise-en-scene has been a serious aspect in the history of film criticism. The director of the film is the person in charge of creating the *mise-en-scene* suitable for the mood of a film (Gibbs, 2002). Director is the one who creates an artistic representation of a script

and the person who decides about all the elements of *mise-en-scene*; the movements of the camera and actors, framing and composition of the elements, shot types and lighting. Such elements are supposed to work together in order to create specific messages or moods and it is the responsibility of the director to work all these “different elements into one organic unity” (Gibbs, 2002, p.58).

Gibbs’ statement about the ‘unity’ of *mise-en-scene* elements is equivalent to the main idea of Gestalt psychology which is about the ‘wholeness’ of visual images. The *mise-en-scene* elements are not able to convey the intended message if they are applied alone and “the relationship *between* different elements is very important” (Gibbs, 2002, p.58). This idea reminds us of Gestalt theory of perception which claims that a ‘whole’ is bigger than sum of its parts, meaning that the small parts of a visual image create the bigger image that we see as a whole. This shows how Gestalt principles of visual perception could be applied to film’s *mise-en-scene*. Different elements of *mise-en-scene* contribute with each other in order to create an overall mood and meaning associated to the film’s story, which functions as the ‘whole’ in the gestalt theory.

3.3.2 Elements of *Mise-en-scene*

The most important elements of *mise-en-scene* that could also be applied in design are as followed:

3.3.2.1 Framing

Framing basically refers to all the visual elements placed within a frame. However framing in motion pictures is totally different from static framing in painting or design; the moving frame in films creates different points of view, therefore framing itself is an individual “dynamic visual element” (Barsam, 2007, p.12). According to Giannetti (2007, p.55) placement of objects within the frame can suggest symbolic ideas. By placing the

visual elements in various parts of the frame such as top, bottom, left, right and center, the filmmaker adjusts the statement of a particular object therefore creates a symbolic meaning. In general, if a visual object is placed in the central part of the frame, it is considered as an important element which also serves as the dominant. Placement of objects at the top, suggests power and being in control of the objects below which is also considered as the dominant.

3.3.2.2 Open and Closed Frames

Applying various design techniques and conventions, a designer or a filmmaker creates a whole new world through framing. Open and closed forms are two different ways of representing the characters and visual elements through a frame (Giannetti, 2007). An open frame suggests the freedom of the characters within the frame, whereas closed frames are designed “to imply that other forces [such as fate; social, educational, or economic background; or a repressive government] have robbed characters of their ability to move and act freely (Barsam, 2007, p.13). Open and closed spaces portray the feelings of the character in that frame; and open space can suggest “potency” whereas a closed space can convey “hopelessness” (Corrigan and White, 2012, p.65).

3.3.2.3 Composition

According to Barsam (2007) composition is referred to the organization, balance and overall relationship of the visual elements within the frame, developing meaning towards the movie’s narrative. Filmmakers precisely visualize every single shot of the film to achieve a “unified whole” (Barsam, 2007, p.11). Framing and movement are two primary aspects of every composition in filmmaking.

3.3.2.4 Dominant

Our eye instinctively tends to harmonize the formal elements in a composition into a unified whole. This is something that happens automatically whether we are aware of it or not. The eye can detect several major elements of a composition simultaneously (Barsam, 2007). However by creating a dominant element, the eye would not wander around the composition as it would be automatically drawn to a specific point. This is how a designer could gain attention through the use of a dominant contrast, also known as the dominant. “The dominant is that area of an image that immediately attracts our attention because of a conspicuous and compelling contrast. It stands out in some kind of isolation from the other elements within the image” (Barsam, 2007, p.13). The dominant is generated by isolation of the element in terms of visual characteristics such as color, size, movement, etc.

3.3.2.5 Movement

In arranging a film’s *mise-en-scene*, the movement of the visual elements within the space and their placement in relation to one another, is a significant factor (Barsam, 2007). “The physical placement of characters can suggest the nature and complexity of whatever relationship may exist between them, and thus their placement and proximity are relevant to our understanding of how the composition of a shot helps to create meaning” (Giannetti, 2007, p.58).

3.4 Theoretical Framework

Clearly typography as a visual element is directly influenced by principles of perception. In film studies, *mise-en-scene* precisely explain the role and behavior of visual elements as well as analyzing the meaning and message they are intended to convey. Therefore if typographic elements are identified as individual visual characters, they

could be analyzed based on *mise-en-scene* interpretation of visual elements in films. Application of Gestalt principles of perception has the role of clarifying how typographic characters are “perceived as a whole form, however, it does not offer explanation as to how meaning is found in that form” (Brownie, 2012, p.119). Therefore this research applies film theory in order to explain that “meaning” which is missing in Gestalt analysis.

Gestalt theory offers a general framework that results in interpretation of visual elements and events as a “whole”. This idea can also be applied in film perception as Pavis (2003, p.229) mentions that individual elements in an image “structure a *mise-en-scene* as a whole”; this means that visual elements do not imply certain meanings unless they are put together with other elements in order to organize a whole. In terms of perceptual concept, film theorists such as Andre Bazin and Jean Mitry have applied ideas from Gestalt into film analysis. Having a Gestaltist view, Mitry thought that the mind interacts closely with the visual phenomena and clarified that human eye functions constructively in terms of cinematic perception (Andrew, 1984, p.20). While Bazin suggested that there are various perceptual aspects in film visual analysis as by deeper examination we can discover more than just intentional messages (Andrew, 1984, p.22). As discussed in the earlier chapters, Rudolf Arnheim, the German Gestaltist, Formalist and film theorist employed his Gestaltist ideas to form his formalist film views. As Max Wertheimer (1924) discussed, the Gestalt principles of perception are universal as they are unconsciously interpreted by viewers regardless of their cultural background, language or level of knowledge. Therefore it is clear that people unconsciously perceive forms in everyday life (as the way they are explained by Gestalt theory) without even being aware of the Gestalt laws.

There are overlapping ideas between Gestalt and formalism within film theory which have formed the theoretical framework in this research. The theoretical framework is presented in an aim to discuss the communicative role of typographical elements in film

titles based on film theory. In this research the textual quality of typographic elements is not the point of focus, whereas words and letters are considered as performing visual characters with gestures (similar to actors in a film). The temporal typographic characters convey emotions as they are not just static forms, but they are meaningful dynamic elements (Small, 1998).

Having explained in previous chapters, visual perception in film theory is mainly described by *mise-en-scene*. The reason *mise-en-scene* interpretation is chosen as the theoretical framework of this research, is because both formalism and *mise-en-scene* supplement Gestalt theory to provide a more inclusive theoretical basis for the phenomena of perceiving and interpreting typography in film title sequences.

Cinematically, the term *mise-en-scene* refers to the arrangement of elements in the scene; however there is another way to approach the meaning of *mise-en-scene* which could be applied to any image or visual scene: The appearance of visual elements within the frame to arouse meaning (Giannetti, 2007). The analysis of typography in film title sequences in this research will be carried on based on the theoretical framework derived from the mutual ideas that formalism in film theory shares with Gestalt theory of perception. The structure of this framework is drawn from the elements of *mise-en-scene* based on Louis Giannetti's book, *Understanding Movies* (2007). Several *mise-en-scene* elements have been chosen for this framework, specifically the ones that share similar perceptual ideas with Gestalt laws.

3.5 Theoretical Rationale

The first fact which is worth mentioning in this theoretical rationale is the choice of Gestalt theory of perception as the main groundwork for this research. The reason why this theory has been chosen, may be explained with reference to the historical background review on the evolution of film title design (Chapter 2). Through the investigation of film title design in the past century it was concluded that film titles evolved during the 1950s

by the innovative methods of designer Saul Bass as film titles after this period began to look more visually impactful and dynamic. This shift which has been initiated by Bass has been majorly influenced by Gestalt principles of visual perception. Being under the tutelage of Georgy Kepes art theorist and Gestalt psychologist, Saul Bass applied Kepes' Gestalt principles provided in *Language Of Vision* in his designs for film titles and other commercial works (Horak, 2014). The fact that the evolution of film title design was significantly impacted by Saul Bass during the 1950s, means that this evolution has occurred under the influence of Gestalt principles of visual perception.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research is to reveal the communicative role of typography in film title sequences. Since typography is being examined in the context of film, it is treated as a visual element similar to what we perceive as movie characters. This research looks at typography as an actor or a key visual element that is manipulated by movement, size, color, proximity and composition, just as movie characters are placed in a scene; under such influences, visual elements (typography) convey different meanings and moods. This placement of elements in a movie scene is also known as *mise-en-scene*. Therefore the elements of *mise-en-scene* and their interpretations are chosen as the basic framework in this research, as they provide precise explanations on placement of visual elements in movie scenes as well as the meaning they are intended to convey. While making a film, the director carefully sets the *mise-en-scene* based on the scenes mood and the function of the characters. The elements and characters are not placed in the frame by chance, there is a reason behind any placement, color, size, and composition. There is always an intention behind every choice the director makes about the visual elements in a scene. For example, when a character is placed on the left end of the frame, and the rest of the scene is just empty space, we might wonder: why the character is not placed in the center of the frame? Why this composition is not balanced? Why is there too much negative space? And many more questions. All such choices were made with

an intention to create certain feelings about that particular character and reveal certain meanings about that environment. Designing title sequences by a graphic designer resembles the way that director designs the film set. They both know what sort of feeling they are supposed to invoke and design their artwork accordingly.

The categories of theoretical framework in this research are constructed based on mutual ideas between Gestalt principles of perception and elements of *mise-en-scene*. However the interpretation of typography in film titles based on this framework heavily relies on *mise-en-scene* analysis of elements in film. Firstly all the aspects of Gestalt principles of perception and *mise-en-scene* elements were compared in order to understand their common ideas. This methodology has been chosen in an effort to highlight the fact that typography in film titles can be interpreted as a visual element in the context of visual perception based on Gestalt, as well as in the context of cinematic perception based on *mise-en-scene*.

For example, Gestalt principle of Similarity is related to Dominance in *mise-en-scene* interpretation; whenever a visual element has dissimilar characteristic to other elements in the scene (in size, color, movement, etc.) based on Gestalt theory it is not considered related to other elements, therefore it is perceived as an isolated or divergent element. This phenomenon in *mise-en-scene* is identified as the dominant object which is presented in a way that draws attention more than other objects in the scene. Such intentional emphasis on one specific element in film is meant to describe certain characteristics about that element, it could imply power, loneliness or sadness associated with a character.

Formalism within film theory is one of the key theories which has been studied in this research. This theory has been chosen because it is the only film theory that focuses deeply on formal elements and construction of a film as an artwork. Formalist filmmakers challenge the limitations of time, two dimensional space and limited framing in order to produce a piece of art that represents real life in a superficial manner (Giannetti, 2008).

Formalist film theorists believe in artificiality and creativity of filmmaking rather than representing raw reality. They think that the director as an artist employs the frame as a two dimensional field of art and expresses his vision through *mise-en-scene* (Giannetti, 2008). Anrheim (1933) the formalist film theorist believes that the camera's perception of a scene is different from what we normally see. In real life we observe objects in depth and real space, but in a scene of a film the perception of depth and space is an illusion, as the display screen is two dimensional. The director needs to generate such illusion by manipulating the view point and creating perspective in the *mise-en-scene* (Giannetti, 2008). Thus, there is a strong association between formalism and film's *mise-en-scene*; formalism in film theory focuses on the arrangement of visual objects (forms) in a scene and how through a right composition they can create an artificial world, and this undoubtedly depends on the scene's *mise-en-scene*. As Giannetti (2008) stated "Formalists are always concerned with patterns, methods of restructuring reality into aesthetically appealing designs. Patterns can be expressed visually, through the photography and *mise en scène*" (p. 509).

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

This chapter analyses typography in various examples of film titles based on the categories provided by the theoretical framework which was discussed during the previous chapter. The following analysis reveals the communicative role of typography as a visual element.

A total of eight title samples have been chosen for this analysis. All the film title sequences presented in this analysis have been chosen due to their representation of meaningful use of typography in relation to the films' concept. They have all been thoughtfully designed in an effort to present the main idea of the film. Title sequence of *Catch Me If You Can* (2002) is displayed as an example for part 1 analysis of Dominance. Typography of opening title credits of this film is designed by Olivier Marquezy. This title sequence has been chosen because of its representation of Similarity and Dominance. Opening credit sequence of *Gone Girl* (2014) designed by Neil Kellerhouse and *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) designed by Kyle Cooper are presented as examples in part 2. These two titles have been chosen for this part as they best signify the importance of size in typography in terms of implying certain meanings. Title sequences of *Fargo* (1996) designed by Balsmeyer & Everett Inc. and *Manhunt* (2013) designed by Manija Emran are displayed in part 3 of this analysis as they represent clear examples of the use of space between the visual elements and its impact on visual perception. Title sequences of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) designed by Neil Kellerhouse and *The Andromeda Strain* (1971) designed by Attila de Lado are chosen as examples for part 4 analysis, because they represent best examples of visual composition and balance. Opening credits of *Bunny Lake is Missing* (1965) designed by Saul Bass is displayed as the example to analyze the use of color and intensity in part 5 of this analysis.

4.1 Dominance

Gestalt law of *Similarity* contributes with a few elements of *mise-en-scene* including the *Dominant*. This principle states that objects with similar features are considered as related; so whenever an object is different in shape, size, movement or color with other objects in a composition, it is recognized as an isolated object which creates a point of emphasis. This statement is parallel to identifying the *Dominant* in Film theory; both *Similarity* and *Dominant* apply to identifying the point of focus within the frame, where the eye is attracted first. If an object is identified as dissimilar to others within the frame, it is considered as the dominant object. The *Dominant* stands out in the image and instantly attracts attention, as it creates contrast alongside other elements (Giannetti, 2007). Our eye tends to “harmonize the formal elements of a composition into a unified whole” (Giannetti, 2007, p.66) however, through the use of the *Dominant*, the eye is led to a specific area in the frame. This contrast can be created in various methods, in black and white images, the *Dominant* is created by the contrast between light and dark elements; whereas in color images the contrasting colors draw attention. A moving element among static ones, central placement and different size of an object can all create contrasting characteristics in a composition.

Example:

The use of dominance can be found in the title sequence design for *Catch Me If You Can* (2002). This technique is applied in this title sequence by creating dissimilarity in two factors: color and movement. In the sequence showing the name of the movie, the attention is drawn to the word ‘me’ which is tend to be the dominant element in in the composition. As shown in Figure 4.1 the word ‘me’ is displayed in white color, in an obvious contrast with all the other words in the phrase that are in black. This contrast of color certainly creates a strong emphasis on this particular word which results in

domination. This domination clearly reflects the character of Frank Abagnale (Leonardo DiCaprio) who is in fact the dominant character of the film. He is a clever young man who illegally makes loads of money and tricks the FBI agent who has been after him for many years. There is another visual element in the composition other than the text, which is the airplane figure. The significance of this element is its white color, similar to the word 'me'. Referring back to Gestalt principle of *Similarity*, the objects with similar attributes are considered related; this perfectly explains the relation between "me" and the airplane which are in contrast with other black elements. This variation in color is intended to deliver the message that the character of 'me' is associated with the airplane, as they both share similar colors; the relation of these elements could actually imply that the 'me' character is on the run and is moving away with the airplane. This fact is indicated even more by analyzing another factor which is *movement*.



Figure 4.1: Title sequence of *Catch Me If You Can* (2002), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

During this observation, this question has aroused: what if the word 'me' was displayed in black color similar to other words in the composition? In order to see the results of this question, a Photoshop manipulated screenshot of the same sequence is

presented in Figure 4.2 in which ‘me’ has been changed from white to black color and is no longer in isolation and looks similar to other letters.



Figure 4.2: Title sequence of *Catch Me If You Can* (2002) [Self manipulated]

As it appears in Figure 4.2, the black colored ‘me’ is not the dominant element in the composition and it is represented similar to other letters. Clearly all the emphasis that was generated by varying in color, no longer exists when the all the word are displayed in the same color. According to Gestalt’s *Similarity* we perceive all the black words as related because they are similar in color. By varying ‘me’ in color, emphasis and attention was drawn to it, if “me” was displayed in the same color as the others, the design would be just an ordinary and meaningless typography with no point of focus or emphasis.

Movement is another factor that indicates the association between the word ‘me’ and the airplane figure. The airplane figure and the word ‘me’ not only relate to each other by similar colors, but we can also see them move in the same direction. The airplane starts moving from the left side of the frame, moves across the phrase ‘Catch Me If You Can’ towards the right side and eventually goes outside the frame. When it moves through the phrase, the word ‘me’ moves along with it towards the right edge of the frame and fades

out, while all the other words stand still (Figure 4.3). The variation in movement and color not only connects 'me' to the airplane, it isolates this word and makes it stand out in the composition which concludes in the fact that 'me' is the dominant word.



Figure 4.3: Title sequence of *Catch Me If You Can* (2002), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

4.2 Size

The matter of size and proportion of visual elements inside a frame in this research is discussed according to the element of *Camera Proxemics* or *Shot Type* in *mise-en-scene*. This topic clarifies the distance between camera and visual objects, which results in how big or small we perceive them in that frame. The significance of this concept is how a particular type of framing affects the perception of size of visual objects and subsequently affecting our interpretation of the object. *Mise-en-scene* perfectly explains how various types of shots can imply different meanings. According to Giannetti (2007, p.11) there are six types of shots, which three of the most important ones are chosen to be discussed in this research, each of these shots associate directly with the size of the objects in the frame: 1) the *Extreme Long Shot* depicts small size objects with less importance, and mostly indicates on the environment surrounding them. In this shot the object is placed far from the camera 2) the *Extreme Long Shot* shows the object in small size where the top and bottom is far from the edges of the frame. In cinema, this type of shot is usually used as the establishing shot where the camera is at its furthest distance from the subject. It actually shows the composition as well as the main relationship between the characters

or their environment; it gives the viewer an insight to the main context of the film 3) the *Close-Up* shot displays little details of the object from less distance where we are not able to see the whole part of the object. “Because the Close-Up magnifies the size of an object, it tends to elevate the importance of things, often suggesting a symbolic significance” (Giannetti, 2007, p.11) which can intensify the emotion of that shot.

Example:

In the opening title sequence of *Gone Girl* (2014) the typography of the movie’s name is depicted rather small in an extreme long shot. This shot pictures a deep gloomy landscape, where the letters are placed in the center and just above the horizon line, as if the wordings are getting far away from our eyes and getting lost in the horizon (Figure 4.4). The main reason for this choice directly relates to the film’s genre and subject matter. *Gone Girl* is a crime, mystery thriller movie about a woman who goes missing. The extreme long shot which depicts the letters in small size, is intended to signify the relationship between the subject matter and the viewer. As the title sequence shows, the typographic elements are placed in a far distance from the camera and are surrounded by a deep empty landscape which actually signify the main character who goes missing. ‘Gone Girl’ is displayed in small size letters to represent loneliness, misery and weakness of the characters.

The film’s name is perceived as a small white form, in an extreme long shot, far from the viewer in an open dark space. It somehow feels like it is going further from the camera which represents the main content of the film where the main character is missing. Based on interpretation of *mise-en-scene*, this type of shot is intended to display the relationship between the subject matter and its environment; in this case, the subject matter is being dominated by its surrounding as if it is being dissolved and lost in it. We might wonder why the designer chose small sized letters for the film’s name; the most important part of

the film title sequence which displays the name of the film is in small sized letters in far distance. Figure 4.5 displays a manipulated title of the same sequence, where the words have been enlarged by Photoshop software. This experiment is done in order to find out whether or not it would have the same feeling if the words were displayed bigger.



Figure 4.4: Title sequence of *Gone Girl* (2014), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>



Figure 4.5: Title sequence of *Gone Girl* (2014) [Self manipulated]

By enlarging the words, they neither seem distant from the viewer nor look moving backwards from the camera as they did when they were smaller. As Gibbs (2012) stated, “the position of the camera is going to determine our understanding of the scene” and

“our relationship to the characters is defined” (p.19) by the position of the camera which in this case would be the distance of the camera from the object. In the original screenshot of the title, the far distance of the words creates a strange and mysterious relationship between the camera (viewer) and the object as if the viewer is not intimate with the character. However in the manipulated screenshot with the big closer words, this feeling is not conveyed. In fact the mood has changed completely because the type of shot has actually changed from an extreme long shot to a medium shot which makes the relationship between the viewer and the subject matter is closer and more intimate. However the main intention of the extreme long shot in the original title sequence was to picture the domination of the environment in relation to the subject matter, which is not implied after the letters have been enlarged in the composition. It is understood from this experiment that the small sized letters in the main titles of “Gone Girl” have the role of creating a mysterious mood and conveying the feeling of loss and being distant. Whereas if the designer had chosen to display bigger letters, it would not have the same meaning and emotion.

Another example of the function of *size* is the main title of *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) in which the word “Hulk” is depicted in big bold letters and gets bigger and bigger as it moves towards the camera. Clearly the choice of big size in this typography directly relates to the appearance and personality of the main character (Hulk) which is extremely strong and powerful, and huge in size. Accordingly the letters that represent the name of this movie are displayed in bold strong manner and they move closer to the viewer implying the power and strength of the main character. It would definitely not imply the same feeling if the word “Hulk” had appeared in small sized letters and moving further from the camera. In that case the viewer could get the same feeling they get from the titles in *Gone Girl*, fragile and distant character which runs away from towards the darkness.

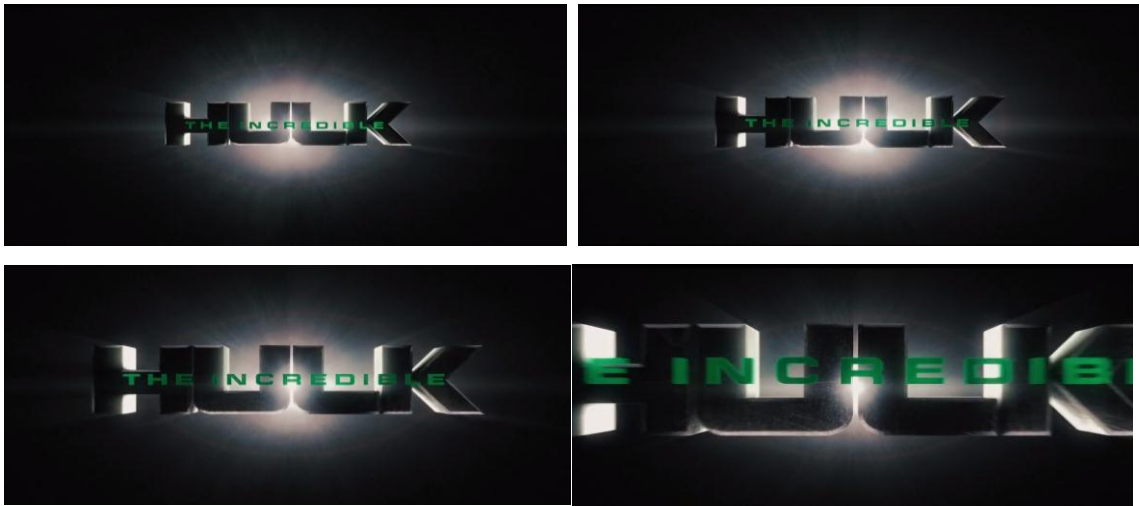


Figure 4.6: Title sequence of *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

4.3 Closeness

Gestalt principle of *Proximity* is associated with *Character Proxemics* in *mise-en-scene*. The term proximity by definition means nearness in place; Gestalt psychology explains *Proximity* as objects closer to one another are considered related. *Character Proxemics* in Film theory also determines the relationship between objects based on the space between them. Designers and filmmakers employ proximity in order to display the emotion or relationship between elements. Giannetti (2007, p.85) explains *Character Proxemics* based on four patterns, whereas two of them are applied in this research: 1) *Intimate* distance which is when two objects are very close to one another or are in physical contact. This kind of distance implies love, closeness and intimacy. In some cases it can also be viewed as an unpleasant or disturbing gesture which implies tension, as if one character is invading the intimate space of another 2) *Public* distance refers to the huge space between objects, and when two characters are far apart in the frame. It shows the detachment of the elements, feeling of suspicion between them, and being psychologically apart. Referring back to Gestalt, when two objects are far from each other, they are not considered related.

Example:

Typography of title sequences in crime mystery movie *Fargo* (1996), display two types of proximity in every actors' names. All first names appear with normal space between letters, in contrast, the letters of the last names are displayed far apart from each other (Figure 4.7 and 4.8). First thing to mention is that according to the *Character Proxemics* in *mise-en-scene* interpretation, the large gaps between the letters of last names, imply suspicion and psychological distance between the characters. So basically every individual name is displayed with two different emotional modes; first name being normal, and last name being detached and growing apart. In fact this visual arrangement has been chosen to a) imply the themes of the film and b) display the underlying personalities of the characters. *Fargo* deals with crime and murder and it portrays various contradictory themes such as life and death, good people and murders, different social behaviors and gender (Goss, 2012). Therefore the different emotional modes portrayed in each name, represent such contradictions in different concepts of the movie and convey inconsistent personalities behind the characters.



Figure 4.7: Title sequence of *Fargo* (1996), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>



Figure 4.8: Title sequence of *Fargo* (1996), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

The typography of the film's name "Fargo" also displays letters far apart from one another (Figure 4.9), which is again associated with the main theme of the film, mystery and murder. The amount of space between letters as visual elements reflects the idea of *Public* distance in a film's *mise-en-scene*. As mentioned earlier, public distance between characters represent not being related to each other as well as lack of trust and intimacy between them. If we consider each alphabetical letter as an individual character, this gap reminds us of them being detached, suspicious, and strangers with lack of trust. According to Gestalt principle of *Proximity* the elements that are far apart from one another are not perceived as a whole and not considered related; therefore in the title representation of "Fargo" we do not perceive the letters as a one element. But we see them as five individual elements that are placed separately. It is only due to the matter of being literate that we can read the alphabets and figure out the word; otherwise, visually we only see five elements.



Figure 4.9: Title sequence of *Fargo* (1996), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

Here comes the idea of closing the gaps and creating more unity between the letters in order to experiment and find out if the same result would occur. The letters of “Fargo” from the same screenshot has been drawn closer to each other by using Photoshop (Figure 4.10). As we see the letters are more united with normal space in between. However the mysterious emotion of a crime movie is no longer conveyed from this composition as it suggests a more unified and coherent arrangement. Here the letters are no longer detached and based on Gestalt we perceive them as one unified element (whole) because they are close to each other and are considered related.



Figure 4.10: Title sequence of *Fargo* (1996) [Self manipulated]

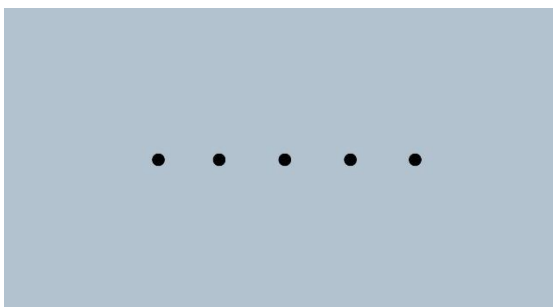


Figure 4.11a: Title sequence of *Fargo* (1996)

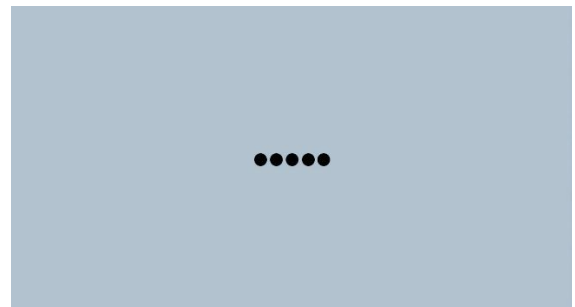


Figure 4.11b: Title sequence of *Fargo* (1996)

A comparison between the two compositions is presented in Figure 4.11a and 4.11b where the letters are replaced with circle shapes. This experiment is done in order to figure out the function of proximity between the elements in a composition. In Figure b there is more solidarity in the composition and based on Gestalt principle of *Proximity* the circles are perceived as a unified whole as they are close together in the composition. However in Figure 4.11a the circles do not seem as untied as they are in Figure 4.11b as there is more negative space between them. The reason behind the typography of “Fargo” directly refers to the film’s theme. As explained before this film is a mystery crime, portraying murders in a cold and brutal environment. The detachment of the elements of “Fargo”

clearly symbolizes the apprehension within the movie and lack of trust between the characters.

Title credits of *Manhunt* (2013) provide another example of using proximity in typography. This documentary is about a female group of CIA who have been searching for terrorist Bin Laden for many years. As it appears in Figure () the proximity between the letters increases from left to right side. The letters M, A, N seem to have a normal space in between but after the letter N the space between the letters, H, U and T gets bigger and bigger; whereas the letter T seems completely detached from the other letters. This shows that the characters are getting further and further away from each other and clearly represents the essence of the film which is a hunt. Based on Gestalt principle of *Proximity*, the letter T would not be considered as related to other letters as there is a huge gap between them. Again similar to “Fargo”, it is because of our recognition of its literal meaning that we are able to read the word “Manhunt” after the letters are detached. If the letters are considered as individual visual elements, based on Gestalt psychology the letter T would be considered as an isolated element in the composition, and such isolation, based on *mise-en-scene* interpretation in film, is considered as a point of attention.

This is actually a clear example of how typography can communicate visually other than being textually informative. The increasing space between the letters of the word ‘hunt’ visually represent the inner meaning of the word. In this example the viewer can both verbally and visually relate to the typography.

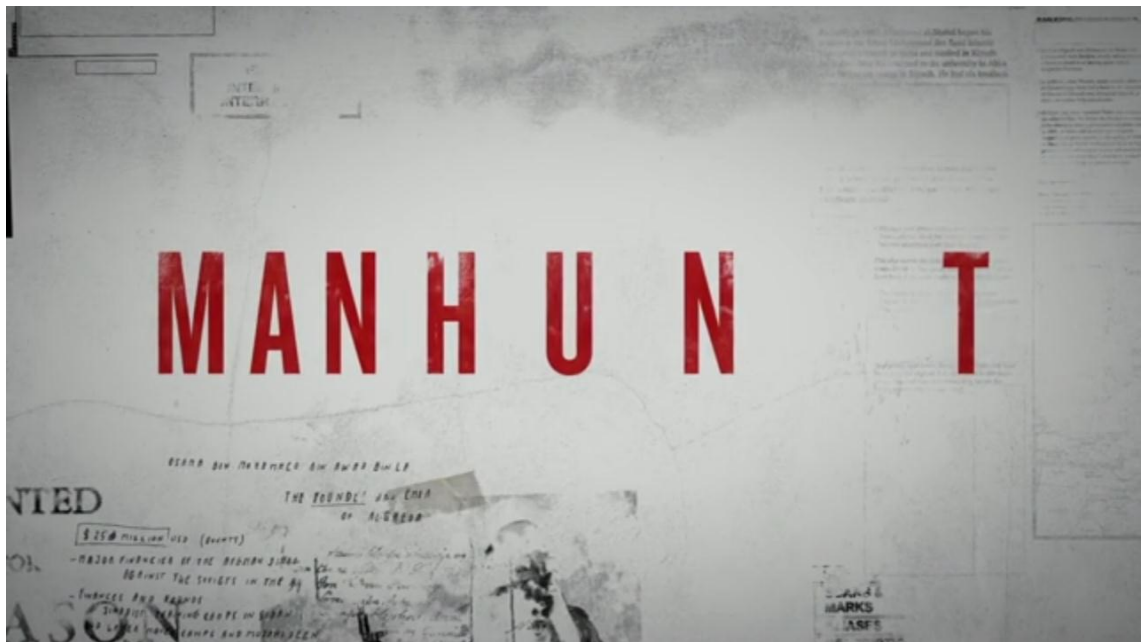


Figure 4.12: Title sequence of *Manhunt* (2013), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

4.4 Composition

Gestalt principle of *Equilibrium* explains the balance and stability within every visual field, which is directly related to *Composition* in *mise-en-scene*. Composition and organization of elements within the frame relies on our sense of balance which results in certain visual perceptions. Gestalt's *Equilibrium* explains that our eye tends to find balance in every visual composition; therefore existence or lack of balance in that composition affects the perceiving message. Balance in Film theory functions exactly the same; the classic filmmakers had their settings arranged in harmonious balance. However the conventional compositions might be deconstructed in modern cinema by composing certain scenes with “lack of equilibrium” (Giannetti, 2007, p.63) in order to display dramatic emotions. According to Giannetti (2007, p.63) depending on the psychological context, a “bad composition might actually be highly effective”. The objects in such cases would not be centered in the frame; therefore the lack of visual balance could reinforce the psychological context. The placement of objects inside a frame, initially and most importantly influences the *Weight* of the composition that suggests the characteristics of

that object. Sometimes by placing a number of different elements, filmmakers intentionally create visual confusion in a composition to indicate chaos.

According to Giannetti (2007, p.70) “the upper part of the composition is heavier than the lower” which is why images with most of their weight on the lower part of the frame, seem more balanced. The important objects are conventionally placed at the center of the composition, however they can be replaced in various parts of the frame in order to create different meanings. If located at the top, that object is associated with power, significance and in control over the objects below, while the bottom part of the frame suggests weakness and vulnerability. Left and right parts of the composition basically imply insignificance, however if an important element is placed at the edges it is associated with darkness, mystery, being in danger, being unnoticed and dominated (Giannetti, 2007).

Example:

Two different types of composition of typographic elements are investigated in this part. The first example looks at the placement of visual elements in the frame. Title sequences of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) provide an example for the relation between the film’s concept and placement of visual elements within the frame. The film is a psychological thriller and the title sequences are meant to visualize the main character’s (Lisbeth Salander) dark personality; a troubled girl with a rough background. There are a series of dark images shown throughout the whole title sequences which is intended to resemble a nightmare. Therefore, in order for the typography to accompany such dark and thrilling feeling, it is not centered in the composition. They are mostly placed closed to the edges and corner such as top left or bottom right of the frame. As it is explained in *mise-en-scene*, such composition of objects is intended to convey a dark and mysterious feeling, which in this case it is completely related to the characteristic of the main character as well as the overall concept of the movie.

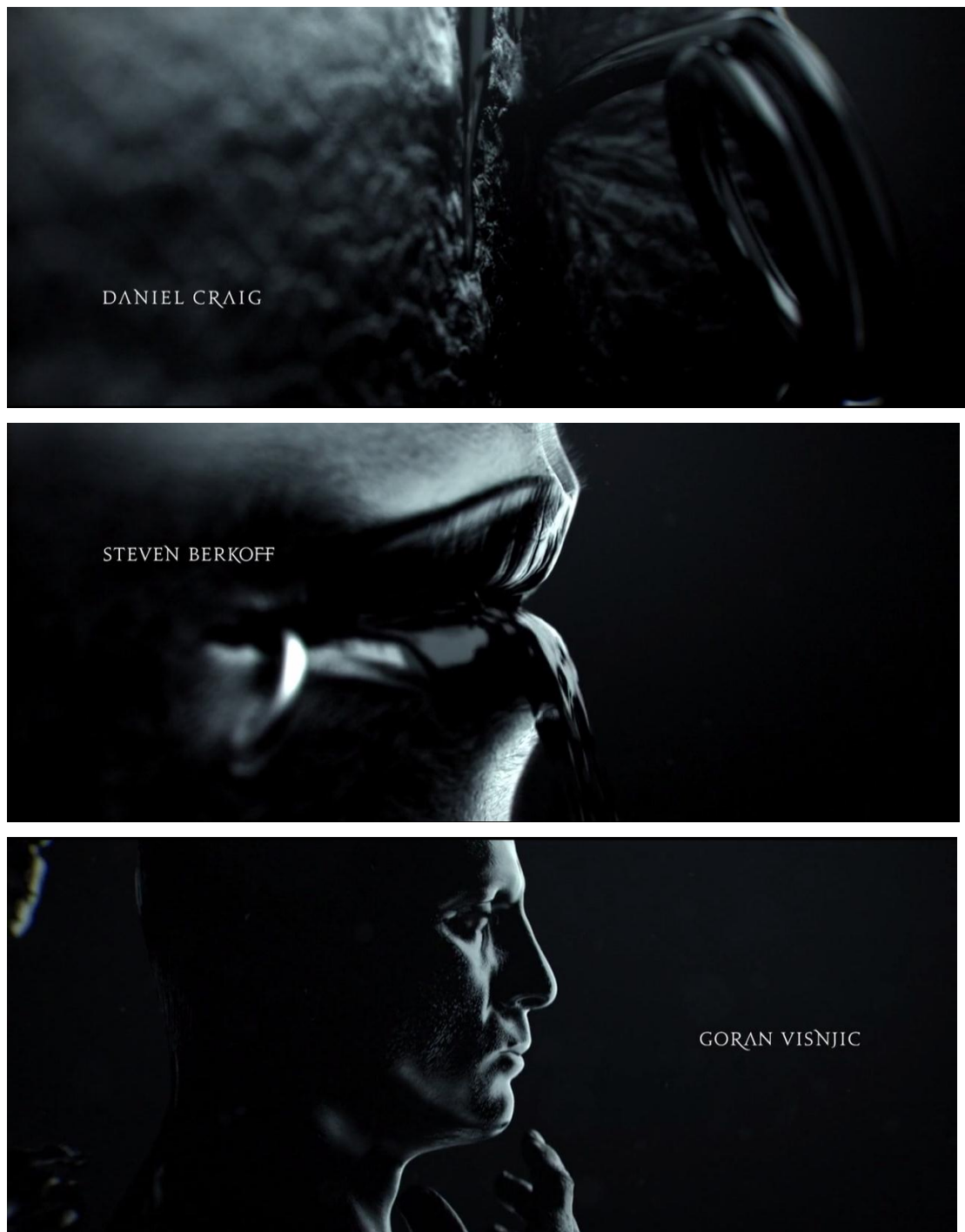


Figure 4.13: Title sequence of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* (2011), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

A different example of composition of typography in film titles, is the credit sequences of *The Andromeda Strain* (1971). As mentioned earlier, the placement of visual elements in a frame represents the *Weight* of the composition that suggests the mood of that scene. Compositions can create visual confusion if there are a number of elements inside one

frame, such compositions with lack of visual balance are usually intended to indicate chaos. Giannetti (2007) states that “if visual confusion is the deliberate intention of an image the director will sometimes overload the composition to produce this effect” (p.68) and this effect is caused by the eye’s struggle to “unify the various elements into an ordered pattern” and “even in a complex design, the eye will connect similar shapes, colors, textures, etc. (p.68)” As displayed in the screenshots (Figure ()) the composition of title sequences of *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), are very distracting, having more than one formal and typographic element in one frame aside from the main titles. The only way to distinguish the main titles is by their white color, which is in contrast with other colored elements. In each title card, there are typographic elements displayed along with the main title, which might be even bigger, bolder and more eye-catching than the main text. As mentioned above, the purpose of creating visual confusion in one composition is to represent chaos and disorder which results in implying tension to the viewer; the viewer struggles to unify the visual elements and make sense of them. Such composition in title design of *The Andromeda Strain*, perfectly represent the theme and content of the film. This science fiction is in fact a thrilling story of a group of scientists who confront a deadly situation in space. Therefore the title sequences are designed to reflect the distressful feeling of tension and thrill of the movie.

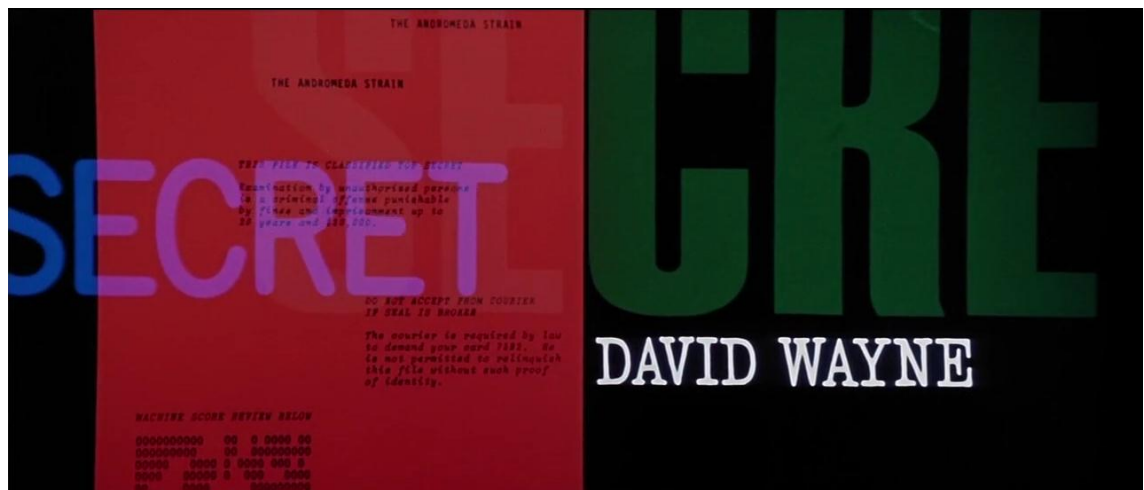


Figure 4.14: Title sequence of *Andromeda Strain* (1971), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

4.5 Color

Gestalt principle of *Similarity* can also be related to *Color Values* in *mise-en-scene*; the color of the elements in an image can be different in hue, intensity and saturation. However *Color Values* in *mise-en-scene* goes beyond identification of the different element, it explains their symbolic meanings; if they are intended to draw attention or being disguised, the message they are meant to convey and what emotions they carry. Rich and high saturated color are powerful and dominant, whereas faded or unsaturated colors tend to imply weak feelings and being unimportant (Giannetti, 2007).

In title sequence of *Bunny Lake is Missing* (1965) designed by Saul Bass, use of color intensity is an important factor in conveying meaning within the typography. This psychological thriller is about the disappearance of a little girl by an emotionally disturbed person. The title sequences are all in black and white and there is no use of color, however Bass's clever manipulation of the grey intensity says enough about the film's main idea (Figure). The words 'Bunny', 'Lake' and 'Is' are displayed in pure black color. The last word which is 'Missing' displays a fade of black to light grey from left to right letters. The letters M, I, and S are displayed in black, from the second S, I, N and G the intensity of black reduces to lighter shades of grey; as if the word 'missing' is being faded away. The technique of reducing intensity of color in typography of this title sequence design perfectly represents the disappearance of the main character in the film, as if the faded letters are being disappeared one by one. It would have been a normal typography if the all the letters were displayed in black color, which the same meaningful quality would have not been implied. Visual communication in this typography is created through simple yet clever manipulation of color intensity.

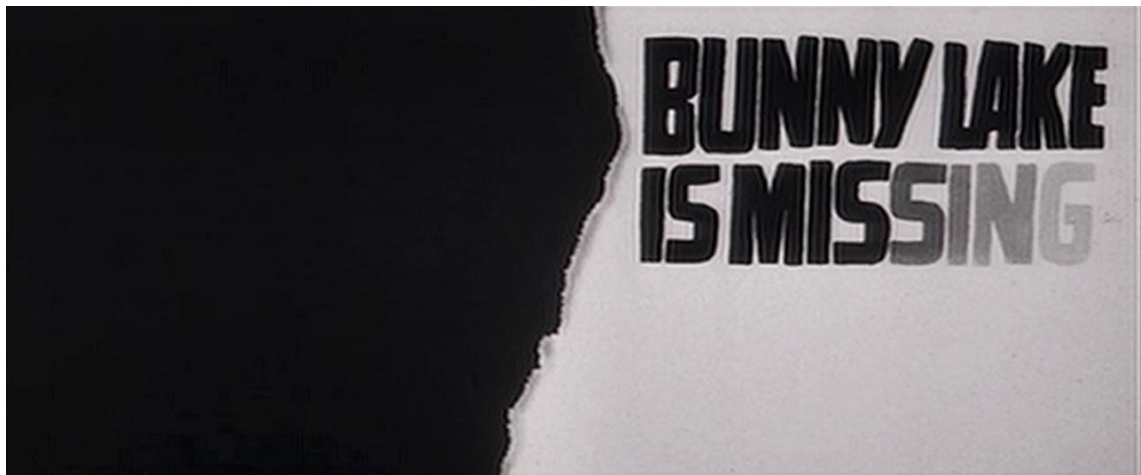


Figure 4.15: Title sequence of *Bunny Lake Is Missing* (1965), Source: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/titles/>

4.6 Findings and Discussion

Referring back to the aims and objectives, it was one of the intentions of this research to find out about the relation between Gestalt theory and formalism within film theory in terms of visual perception, as well as finding out the mutual ideas between the two fields in order to form a groundwork for the study of typography in film titles. The purpose of this study was to understand the communicative value of typography in such context relying on the interpretations of *mise-en-scene* (film theory) and Gestalt psychology. Having studied Gestalt psychology of visual perception and various principles of this theory, it was understood that such principles apply to the study of formal elements in film; more specifically in *mise-en-scene* approaches.

In order to answer the first question of this research: “How are Gestalt principles applied in formalism within film theory in terms of visual perception?” this study first looked into the history and basic concepts of the two theories. Film theory analyses the formal elements such as set composition, lighting, color and editing techniques and interprets the emotional and communicative effects of such elements (Andrew, 1984). Formalism in film theory analyses the structure of a film and how visual forms create such structures. The formal elements in a film, develop the film’s narrative as well as

conveying certain meanings in association to the narrative. The formalist film theorist, Rudolf Arnheim's ideas on Gestalt perception developed his formalist film theory. He believed that perception is a crucial factor in film theory as the viewer understands the film by visual sense (Stam, 2000). Arnheim (1988, p.226) also stated that "in a Gestalt, components interact to the extent that changes in the whole influence the nature of the parts, and vice versa". Formalistic films may seem abstract or symbolic as formalist filmmakers tend to create specific emotions by portraying certain compositions (Andrew, 1984). Such claims by formalist film theorists, indicate that formalism in film studies is originally derived from Gestalt psychology of perception.

For the second question of the research: "How do various characteristics of typography such as size, composition, color and proximity affect the perception of the title sequences in terms of expression of the mood and essence of the film (based on interpretations of formalism in film theory)?" Firstly, the study looked deeply into both Gestalt principles and formalism within film theory. The seven principles of Gestalt theory: *Proximity*, *Similarity*, *Common Fate*, *Prägnanz*, *Continuity*, *Closure* and *Figure and ground* were investigated in this study as well as the elements of *mise-en-scene*: *Framing*, *Composition*, *Open and Closed Forms*, *Dominant* and *Movement*. The investigation of the features of these two fields was done in an effort to find the common ideas between them and on top of that, to develop a theoretical framework based on these mutual ideas in order to build a groundwork for a new research. Next, a theoretical framework was developed in order to look at typography in film titles from two perspectives of visual perception theory and film interpretation. This framework consists of five categories: *Dominance*, *Size*, *Closeness*, *Composition* and *Color*. Finally, various examples of typography in film title sequences from different films and designers were analyzed according to the theoretical framework. Typography in this analysis, was considered as a visual element (not a textual element) and the communicative role of typography was

investigated based on *mise-en-scene* interpretation of visual elements in film. In each category, there were useful findings in terms of how typography reveals the mood and content of the films.

Dominance is the first category of the analysis, which has been developed based on similar ideas between Gestalt principle of *Similarity* and *The Dominant* element of *mise-en-scene*. Gestalt states that objects with similar features are considered related; so if an object is different in shape, size, movement or color with other objects in a composition, it is identified as an object which creates a point of emphasis. This principle is similar to the *Dominant* in Film theory; both *Similarity* and *Dominant* are used in creating the point of focus within the frame. By looking into first example of this category, which was the opening credit of *Catch Me If You Can* (2002), illustrates that domination can be generated by various aspects in one composition. The word “me” in this example was the dominant element in the composition based on its different color and movement. This emphasis on the word “me” conveyed the message about the “me” character in the movie (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) which is chased by the police and always running away from them. The similarity of “me” and the airplane figure in color and movement, associate them together based on Gestalt theory, and the viewer perceives them as related. This means that “me” and the airplane figure are dominating against the rest of the elements in the composition. This example indicated that typographic elements with different assets against others in a composition create dominance that can convey certain messages about the film’s narrative and characters. A self-manipulated example of the same credit sequence was provided in this part in order to experiment the possibilities of changing the color. The white colored “me” was changed into black color, same as all the other words in the scene. By this experiment, the word “me” was no longer a dominant element and was not associated with the airplane figure. The point of this experiment was to reveal the significance of color dissimilarity in a composition and how it is capable of

signifying certain messages. Another factor that was discovered as a significant asset in this example was *movement*. As the airplane figure moves towards the left side of the frame, we see that the word “me” moves along with it while all the other elements remain steady. Based on Gestalt principle of *Similarity*, it is explained that when two elements have similar movements they are considered related, therefore we perceive “me” and the airplane figure related to each other. From this visualization it is communicated that the “me” character goes away with the airplane. Even before watching the film or knowing the story, this is something that the viewer could clearly elicit from watching the title sequences.

Size is the second discussed category which is developed based on the element of *Camera Proxemics* or *Shot Type* in *mise-en-scene*. Size of visual elements in a scene is determined based on their distance with the camera, which results in how big or small the viewer perceives them in the frame. Certain size of visual objects in *mise-en-scene* imply various meanings in film interpretation. Size can also determine the domination of visual elements according to Gestalt principle of *Similarity* as in objects with similar size are considered related and the object with different size is considered as a point of attention. However the examples provided in this category are only analyzed based on *mise-en-scene* interpretation in film. The first example was the typography of the main credit from *Gone Girl* (2014) which is displayed in small sized letters and is referred to as an extreme long shot in *mise-en-scene*. This analysis interpreted the depiction of the typography in small size, and if it would imply the same mood and feeling if the letters were bigger. Clearly the long shot and the distant subject matter (typography) relates to the genre and mood of the film which is a crime mystery about a woman who goes missing. The small letters are meant to convey loneliness, misery and weakness of the characters and most significantly it points out to the ‘missing’ of the subject matter as the typography seems to be distant from the camera and getting lost in its dominant surrounding. According to

Gibbs (2012) “the position of the camera is going to determine our understanding of the scene” and “our relationship to the characters is defined” based on the position of the camera (p.19). So if the camera is in long distance from the visual element it suggests a non-intimate and strange relationship between the viewer and visual object. In order to examine the effect of enlarging the typography, same screenshot has been manipulated and provided with bigger letters. Through this experiment it was understood that the bigger size of the typography does not create the same emotion and mood as the original typography. The letters did not seem distant from the viewer or moving backwards from the camera as they did when they were smaller. In fact the mysterious mood of the original title is not conveyed when the letters are displayed in bigger size, as the relationship between the viewer and the object is closer and more intimate. In general it is figure from this discussion that the relationship between the viewer and visual objects (typography) is determined by the distance between them; the closer the visual object, the more intimate is the relationship. In the case of *Gone Girl* the small sized typography has a significant role in creating the mysterious mood and distant relationship.

In contrast to the function of size in title design of *Gone Girl*, titles from *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) were examined in order to observe the result of applying bigger size in typography of film titles. The big bold letters of ‘Hulk’ which get bigger and bigger by moving towards the camera, clearly indicate a reverse result to the previous example in *Gone Girl*. As mentioned before, the enlargement of letters in ‘Hulk’ represent the main character of the film which is huge in figure and also has great strength and power. Therefore the typography for the main credit of the film has been created in big bold letters, and by moving towards the camera it is intended to represent the sense of domination of the main character towards the viewer. As discussed in the previous example, the distance between the viewer and visual elements identify the relationship between them. In this example the in-between distance decreases as the letters move

forward, therefore they get extremely close to the viewer which conveys the feeling of being dominated and disturbed by that character.

The third category of analysis was Closeness which has been developed based on Gestalt's principle of *Proximity* and *Character Proxemics* in *mise-en-scene*. According to Gestalt's principle of *Proximity*, objects closer to one another are considered related. *Character Proxemics* in Film studies defines the relationship between objects based on the space between them and interprets the emotional mood between the characters. This category has been analyzed in order to understand the significance of closeness and space between typographic elements and how it effects their emotional message. By examining the first example in this category which was the title credits of *Fargo* (1996) the significant role of proximity in creating the mysterious and suspicious mood was revealed. Initially the name credits were examined which are displayed in two various modes of proximity: first names with normal spacing between letters and last names are displayed with big gaps between each letter. It was understood that the main intention of this choice of typography was to represent the contradictory among the characters and concepts of the film (such as gender contradictions) as well as the double personality of the characters. The examination went on with observing the main credits of the film which displayed the word 'Fargo' with distant letters having big spaces in-between. After comparing this example with a self-manipulated example of the same title with less spacing between the letters, it was figured that the choice of having more space between the letters results in representing the mood of mystery and lack of trust between characters. In the original title design of 'Fargo' with letters being far away and detached from one another, according to Gestalt's *Proximity*, each letter is perceived as one individual element and not related to each other; while they are supposed to create a word and a word consists of letters attached to each other. The assumption would be that the word 'Fargo' is displayed in a detached and non-unified style where each letter signifies

an isolated character in a non-intimate relationship with other characters as if they do not trust each other to get closer. This representation of typography is done in an effort to imply the feeling of loneliness and isolation of the main characters in film.

In another experiment done on closeness of typographic elements of 'Fargo', each letter was replaced by circle shapes in both original title and the manipulated one with reduced space between the letters. In this experiment it was understood that based on Gestalt principle of *Proximity*, the composition with elements closer to each other looks more unified, however this unity between the visual elements did not approve the film's style and mood.

Composition was developed as the fourth category of this analysis which is created according to common ideas of Gestalt principle of *Equilibrium* and *Composition* in *mise-en-scene*. Gestalt's *Equilibrium* claims that our eye seeks balance in every visual composition; therefore existence or lack of balance in that composition results in perceiving various messages. This means that if one composition is visually heavy on one side, it is not balanced; this lack of balance and its various emotional meanings are interpreted in film studies and *mise-en-scene*. The first example of this category, investigated the effects of a non-balanced typographic composition on the viewer. Title sequences of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), a psychological thriller about a troubled young girl with a dark personality, display all the typographic elements on the sides of the composition and none of them are centered in the frame. Based on *mise-en-scene* interpretation of Giannetti (2007), composition of objects closed to the edges of the frame conveys a dark and mysterious feeling about that object, which in this case it is completely related to the personality of the main character and the overall concept of the movie.

Composition was also discussed in another example which displayed lack of balance in visual confusion in a typographic context. By investigating the title sequences of *The*

Andromeda Strain (1971) it was figured that typographic elements can be composed in a frame along with other elements in order to create an unbalanced composition. In this example, such composition was designed in order to convey the feeling of tension to the viewers based on the main content of the film. Visual confusion is generated in complex compositions as result of the eye's tendency to unify the visual elements. This means that our eye tends to relate similar visual elements, and this causes the feeling of tension. Such feeling certainly would not occur by looking at a balanced and clean composition.

The fifth category of this analysis was color, and it was mainly developed based on the interpretation of *Color Values* in *mise-en-scene*. Differences in color hue, intensity or saturation identifies the elements' function in the *mise-en-scene*; whether they are intended to draw attention or being disguised, the message they are meant to convey and what emotions they carry. The example presented in this part displayed the function of color intensity in typography of title sequences of *Bunny Lake is Missing* (1965). In this black and white typography the last four letters were faded into lighter shades of grey whereas all the other letters remained black. Through this analysis it was understood that the reduction of intensity in the last letters signified the main content of the film which was about the missing of a child. According to Giannetti (2007) high intensity or saturation of colors signify power and dominance whereas faded and unsaturated colors tend to imply weak feelings. In this case, when the viewer observes the reduction of intensity in the letters of 'missing', it actually reminds them of the meaning of the 'missing' as if the letters are being faded and disappeared.

By investigating typography in title sequences in five categories of theoretical framework which has been developed based on common ideas between Gestalt principles of perception and formalism within film theory, the above results has been generated. This analysis was done in an effort to achieve the two aims of the research: 1) to analyze the communicative function of typography in film credit sequences 2) To investigate how

various aspects of typography interact based on formalism in film theory to convey the mood and content of the film. The findings in each category of the analysis clearly explain the communicative function of typography in film title sequences, which has been the first aim of this research. The interaction of the various aspects of typography has also been discussed under each category, where five different aspects of typographic features were interpreted by examples of various film title sequences, in an aim to find out how they generate certain moods and messages in relation to the film's content.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This research was initiated in an aim to develop our understanding of visual perception of typography in film title sequences, as a connotative and formal element, as well as how it is employed to convey certain meanings. While the process of design and typography is mainly intuitive, this research reveals the conscious and theoretical explanation of this intuitive procedure. This study broke down the process of typography design in film titles into smaller parts and examined how each of these parts work through the use of Gestalt psychology of perception and formalism in film theory. The combination of the common concepts from *mise-en-scene* and Gestalt described the phenomenon of visual perception of typography in film titles in terms of cinematic perception. Understanding the basics of visual perception had a crucial role in developing this study as the analysis framework is based on principles of visual perception derived from Gestalt psychology and formalism in film theory.

An important finding which basically shaped the theoretical groundwork of this research was that the evolution of film title design which happened during the 1950s has been influenced by Gestalt psychology of visual perception. By investigating the development of film title design in the past century it was concluded that the evolution of film titles during the 1950s was impacted by the works of designer Saul Bass as film titles started to look more expressive and dynamic as well as having a simplistic and abstract style. Saul Bass has been heavily influenced by Gestalt principles of visual perception as he was one of the students of Georgy Kepes art theorist and Gestalt psychologist. He applied Kepes' Gestalt principles provided in *Language Of Vision* in his designs for film titles and other commercial works (Horak, 2014). The fact that film title design has been developed by Saul Bass during the 1950s, means that this evolution was indirectly impacted by Gestalt principles of visual perception.

Based on analysis of various examples of typography in film titles in chapter 4 of this research, it is suggested that typography can be considered as an individual visual elements in a scene, similar to actors in a film, and it can be interpreted as an element of *mise-en-scene*. It is understood that other than textual meanings, typography can convey visual implications and can be treated as other formal elements in a composition in order to visually communicate certain messages. A film's *mise-en-scene* is interpreted based on placement of actors and visual elements in a scene, similarly, film title sequences can be described based on typographic elements; in other words, typographic elements in film titles have a similar role of actors in a movie.

This study investigated typographic examples based on five categories based on the theoretical framework: Dominance, Size, Closeness, Composition and Color. It is concluded that these five aspects can be employed to demonstrate theoretically how typography communicates certain meanings in relation to the film's theme and content. Domination of typographic elements can be represented by dissimilarity of the elements and creating contrast between them. This contrast is developed in various aspects such as differences in size, color, and movement in order to create a point of emphasis and draw attention. Domination of a typographic elements may suggest certain meanings according to the film's content. Size of typographic elements in a film title sequence actually represents their distance from the viewers which in fact determines the relationship between the element and the viewer. The size may vary based on the message they are intended to imply about the film's characters of story. Closeness refers to the proximity between the typographic elements inside a frame. This aspect determines the relationship between the visual elements, which is intended to reflect the relationship between the film's characters. The closer they are, the more intimate is their relationship. Composition is referred to the placement of the typographic elements in a scene. According to film studies of *mise-en-scene*, different places inside a frame represent symbolic meanings

about the visual elements, which also applies to placement of typographic elements in a film title sequence. Complex compositions would create visual confusion which implies chaos in relation to the film's story. Color value of the typographic elements also imply certain meanings as they may vary in hue, saturation or intensity.

Another important factor which has been demonstrated through this research was the internationality of the language of art based on Gestalt psychology. Based on Arnheim's study in *Art and Visual Perception* (1974) all people share a similar experience in visual perception of objects, regardless of their language and cultural background. Gestalt principles of visual perception (Similarity, Proximity, Figure and Ground, Pragnanz, Continuation, Simplicity and Closure) work in similar ways in human visual perception which indicates the fact that regardless of people's race or cultural background, visual elements are perceived according to a same psychology in the brain.

Further studies on other aspects of typography in film title sequences such as typeface may be carried on in the future as this study was limited to only five aspects of typography. Deeper studies on Gestalt psychology is also suggested as there are more areas to explore in terms of visual perception of typography. More investigation on the works of great title designers such as Saul Bass would also be useful in terms of improving design skills. In general, understanding the visual perception of typography based on film theory, enlightens graphic designers and typographers about the significant role of typography in communicating visual messages other than their textual qualities in film title sequence. Creating meaningful title sequences for films and motion pictures is considered as a piece of art, therefore having the knowledge of visual perception based on both Gestalt and Film theory, would improve designers' ability to enhance communication through typography.

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